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# POLITICAL VIOLENCE IN BANGLADESH: EXPLAINING THE ROLE OF STATE

ZUNAID ALMAMUN

155 Pages

Violence has been an integral part of the politics of Bangladesh since after its independence. The government has used the coercive apparatus of the state in order to confront the political opponents and the dissenters. Irrespective of the type of regime and political parties in power, the state always perpetrated violence against its citizens. On the one hand, the government used the law enforcement agencies, and the specialists of violence relied on coercion against the citizens, on the other hand, various groups appeared as the affiliates of the government in perpetrating violence. However, the nature of violence changed over time, and so did the actors, instruments, and the scopes of violence. Besides, the role of the state towards violence also changed. This thesis explains the violence perpetrated by the state in three phases. The first phase is from 1972 to 1990, the second phase is from 1991 to 2011, and the third phase is from 2012 to 2018. The actors of violence are divided into two groups that are the government agent and the government affiliates. Actors in both of these groups changed during these three phases. The instruments of violence were mostly physical and legal in all these three phases. A new type of instrument has been noticed during the third phase, which is the cyber instrument. With the advent of new technology, the state introduced various types of cyber instruments to perpetrate violence against its targets. The scopes of violence were mostly the political opposition, the press, and the dissenters. The incumbent government frequently relied on coercion to confront the political opposition, alternative political ideology, freedom of the press, and any dissent. A new kind of scope is also noticed during the third phase that is

potential dissenters. Unlike the other two phases, the state perpetrated violence against the potential dissenters so that it can silence citizens even before they express their dissension. Therefore, the role of the state towards political violence has also noticeably changed. This thesis explains that the blurring boundary between the state and the government has posed a moral legitimacy crisis to the government. Besides, the opposition political parties have frequently challenged the moral rights of the government to rule the country. The challenges posed at the government were dealt with coercion in every phase. Hence, I argue that the moral legitimacy crisis of the government resulted in the changing role of the state in perpetrating violence against the citizens. The incumbent government has intensified violence through the government agents and government affiliates in order to enforce legitimacy and thus stay in power.

**KEYWORDS:** Political violence; Bangladesh; state approaches

POLITICAL VIOLENCE IN BANGLADESH: EXPLAINING THE ROLE OF STATE

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A Thesis Submitted in Partial  
Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

Department of Politics and Government

ILLINOIS STATE UNIVERSITY

2020

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# POLITICAL VIOLENCE IN BANGLADESH: EXPLAINING THE ROLE OF STATE

ZUNAID ALMAMUN

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## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

### Introduction

Why does a state perpetrate violence against its citizens? Why do some citizens of a state keep perpetrating violence against the other citizens in tandem with the state law enforcement agencies? Why does a state even support political violence carried out by the citizens to some extent? If violence is an integral part of politics, then how does the state change its role towards perpetrating violence over the volatile political landscape? These questions are very significant in the context of Bangladesh as violence has been an integral part of the politics of Bangladesh, before and after its independence in 1971. The country was born out of a nine-month-long independence war with Pakistan, which started with a genocide perpetrated by the government of Pakistan. Since independence in 1971, the country has regularly experienced various kinds of political violence in the past five decades. Although the term ‘political violence’ may sound too straight forward, there is no agreed definition in the scholarly literature. There is ample academic debate about what constitutes political violence or what type of violence may be considered as political violence. In this thesis, I define political violence as *an organized act of violence through the use of physical force to inflict damage on the target to achieve a certain political aim*. I will operationalize the definition of political violence later in the conceptual part, however, among the various types of political violence described by different scholars, Bangladesh has experienced a great deal of them such as genocide, war, social movement, terrorism, political assassinations, armed conflict between political parties, etc. in the last five decades from 1971-2018. Several successful as well as foiled coup d’états, assassinations of high-

profile politicians including two presidents, presence of autocratic regime, political upheavals, street agitations testify to the political instability characterized by violence. Therefore, despite the end of the independence war in 1971, political violence did not end in the history of Bangladesh.

### **Brief Background of the Violent Politics of Bangladesh**

The political history of Bangladesh is marred with the experience of multiple types of government, including civil and military, and various types of political violence. Riaz (2016, p. 1) argues that “[t]o say that the political history of Bangladesh is mercurial and eventful is an understatement”. Bangladesh experienced ‘Populist Authoritarianism’ between 1972 and 1975, ‘Military Dictatorship’ between 1975 and 1990, democratic government with hope and frustration between 1991 and 2013, and hybrid regime since 2014 (Riaz, 2016). The following discussion briefly shows how violence became an integral part of politics in Bangladesh.

The independence war of Bangladesh was participated by people from almost all classes, and after the independence war, although a ceremonial arm surrender of the freedom fighters took place in 1972, however, Riaz (2016) argues that it was ‘chiefly of symbolic value.’ Therefore, one of the key challenges to the newly liberated state was to control the potential threat to law and order due to the large supply of weapons at the hands of mass people. Violence became a new normal with the availability of illicit weapons, and it also played a pivotal role in achieving political objectives (Islam, 2011). Additionally, accommodating different political ideologies, particularly a radical fraction of Bangladesh Awami League (BAL) with the aim of ‘scientific socialism’ appeared as a threat

to the state as that radical fraction propagated that the independence war is an unfinished revolution and there is way more to go to establish scientific socialism in Bangladesh. Eventually, the radical group formed their own political party named 'Jatiyo Samajtantrik Dal' (JSD) in 1972. Riaz (2016) describes the rise of various leftist political parties with a vision to bring the proletariat revolution in Bangladesh. For example, another clandestine radical political group unearthed their existence named 'Sarbahara Party' (SP), which began armed conflict against the law enforcement agencies of the state and also began to attack the rich farmers. There were some other leftist political groups who voiced against the ruling government and challenged the ideology of the regime. They also gained support from people in different places in Bangladesh.

The ideological difference among the political parties and activist groups appeared as a threat to the state. The political parties also resorted to violence to achieve their political goals. The state started to suppress the dissenting voice very soon after the liberation war. On the first day of the year 1973, the law enforcement agencies shot two student activists of the National Awami Party (NAP) to death in a procession. With this beginning of violence against citizens perpetrated by the state, the law and order situation quickly deteriorated, which resulted in scores of murder, secret killing, kidnapping, raping where both the state and its citizens were engaged (Riaz, 2016). Between 1972 and 1975, the country experienced extensive political violence. The government and the political parties blamed each other for excessive violence and killing (Islam, 2011). The state began to lose control of its citizen and started to depend more on coercive measures to regain control. The head of the government, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, who once was an acclaimed populist political leader and the prime minister of Bangladesh, consolidated the power

through becoming the president of a one-party state after amending the constitution and banning all political activities and parties. This unanticipated development resulted in his assassination with his family members through a military coup d'état.

The country experienced the era of the military dictatorship under Ziaur Rahman from 1977 to 1981 and Hussain Muhammad Ershad from 1982 to 1990. Ziaur Rahman lifted the ban on political activism and revived the political parties in Bangladesh in 1977. However, the regime under the military dictatorship was also characterized by political violence with many foiled coup d'états, murders of high-profile political leaders including the assassinations of Ziaur Rahman, senior military officials. While a large number of foiled and a few successful coup d'états demonstrate that the state was regularly in a crisis of legitimacy, the uprising by different political parties, widespread protests on the street, and the state's heavy reliance on violence against its citizen exemplify the coercive nature of the state in this period. Islam (2011, p. 31) argued that 'Dissident voices were muzzled, and, killings of opponents were allowed where deemed necessary.'

Bangladesh re-embarked on the democratic trajectory through the fifth parliamentary election in 1991, followed by the resignation of Hussain Muhammad Ershad. The election and the transition period from the military government to the democratic government were administered by a unique system called the Caretaker Government (CTG). It was expected that the country would now experience political stability and peaceful politics as the government was formed led by the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) through a participatory democratic election. However, hope did not last long, and violence continued. Therefore, this period is characterized by electoral violence, violence

against a religious and ethnic minority, violence against opposition political parties, Islamist militancy, violent military vigilance, mutiny, extra-judicial killing, enforced disappearance, shoot to death in public procession, abduction, torture, custodial death, etc.

The issue of CTG has always been in the center of political violence in Bangladesh since 1993. The demand to incorporate the provision of CTG in the constitution by the opposition parties and the reluctance of the ruling party to comply with this demand engendered scores of violence. Eventually, the provision was incorporated in the constitution, and four elections were held under the CTG, including that of 1991. Despite having the provision in the constitution, the pre-election and post-election period of Bangladesh was featured by massive violence. A significant part was coercive measures of the state against the citizens in rallies, processions, political gatherings, etc. Interestingly, the BAL scrapped the provision of the CTG and abrogated it from the constitution through the 15<sup>th</sup> amendment in 2011 despite once they resigned from the parliament in 1994 in demand of the permanent provision of CTG in the constitution.

The political situation after the abrogation of the provision of CTG in 2011 has fundamentally been different from the rest of the preceding circumstance. Because, before the fifth parliamentary election in 1991, Bangladesh has experienced consolidation of power, election manipulation, a ceremonial election under the various heads of state with the help of state institutions. Lewis (2013) explains that due to being a young democracy, Bangladesh has regularly experienced a political struggle between ruling and the opposition groups over the questions of democratic transition of power. Therefore, the credibility of the state has long been in question, and to get rid of the abuse of state

apparatus, the provision of CTG was introduced in the political landscape of Bangladesh. The CTG was responsible for organizing a free, fair, and inclusive election where the state institutions would remain free from manipulation and political interference. Eventually, the system was functioning relatively better in organizing a credible election than any previous system. It also gave hope to the citizens that if they are unhappy with any government and their functions with the state, the citizens would have an opportunity to vote and elect someone whom they would want. It also managed the political parties to participate in political activities with and against each other despite a serious lack of trust among them. Therefore, both the government and state institutions were subject to a test of transparency and accountability in every five years, if not in everyday life. However, the scrapping of the CTG provision also took away the available scope of the citizen to dissent with the state. It has been experienced twice in the case of two national parliamentary elections in 2014 and 2018, as well as in several local governments, municipal, and city corporation elections. The incumbent has gone beyond any accountability as the ruling party enjoys an overwhelming 'majority' in the parliament with no effective opposition. Executive branch has amassed enormous power through amendments to constitution and the parliament is empowered to remove judges from the bench under appropriate circumstances.

The enormous 'power' of the state has also given it an extreme 'monopoly' over violence, a defining characteristic of state in the Weberian notion of violence. Therefore, the state has appeared as more violent against its citizens since 2012. While previously the target of the state perpetrated violence was mainly from political parties, and military personnel engaged in coup d'états, or mutiny, the state has now widened its scope and



targeted its citizen from different classes and professions including students, teachers, journalists, labors, workers, businessmen, lawyers, human rights activists, manifested dissenters, and potential dissenters. On the one hand, the state is perpetrating political violence against its citizens through its law enforcement agencies, on the other hand, the state is supporting political violence perpetrated by the political wings of the ruling party in the government. On the one hand, the government is criminalizing certain civil rights through enacting and implementing different questionable laws such as Information and Communication Technology Act (ICT Act), Digital Security Act 2018 and thus suppressing the manifested or potential dissent, on the other hand, the state is ostensibly fostering a culture of impunity for those who are perpetrating political violence against its citizens.

### **Research Questions**

It is against this backdrop of longstanding contentious political development and increasing involvement of the state in political violence, particularly in the past decade, this thesis aims to examine the nature, and scope of political violence perpetrated and supported by the state. Consequently, this thesis intends to respond to two questions.

1. Has there been any change in the role of the state towards political violence in Bangladesh in terms of its nature and scope?

The first research question warrants a critical examination of the political violence perpetrated and supported by the state from two perspectives. First, since Bangladesh has experienced various types of government in between 1972-2018, it is important to explore how the state has perpetrated or supported political violence against its citizens. The existing literature shows that the democratic political system allows more opportunities

for political violence for its citizens, while the authoritarian political system shrinks the space (Hegre, 2014). Arguably, the democratic political system is supposed to have less of a state perpetrated or supported political violence against its citizen. Therefore, it needs to be examined if there has been any change in the role of state towards political violence during different types of government. Particularly, how the state has responded to the necessity of using political violence, in what nature the state responded to, and what were the scopes of its violence. Secondly, what changes we can identify from the state actions over the past decades regarding the power of the state, threats from citizens against the state, etc.

**2. If there has been a change, then what explains this changing nature?**

The second research question is crucial as it warrants the explanation of the changing nature of the state's approaches towards political violence. It will guide us through the explanations that can answer why the state has changed its approaches. Kleinfeld (2017) argues that in some democratic countries, the economic and political elites rely on violence with the help of criminal groups, musclemen to maintain their privilege, win elections, and politicize security providers and use them in political violence. In the case of Bangladesh, Rahman (2019) argues that the attempt of the political elites to consolidate party powers has contributed to social and political polarization that instigated the violence. Therefore, it requires us to explain how the role of the state has been changed in terms of the nature and scope of political violence. It will respond as to why there has been a change in the nature and scope of political violence perpetrated or supported by the state.

In responding to these research questions, this thesis argues that there has been noticeable change in the role of state towards political violence in Bangladesh in terms of its nature and scope. The state has become more predatory, increased its reliance on violence against the political opponents, the dissenters, and the press. While the state is itself remained an actor of violence, other non-state actors affiliated with the state gained salience and perpetrate violence against the targets. The scope of violence has also been expanded. Alongside the political opposition, the press, and the dissenters, the potential dissenters have also become the target of violence perpetrated by the state and its affiliates. The instruments of violence have also become versatile. Beside the physical and legal instruments, the state has adopted an array of cyber instruments to perpetrate violence against the citizens. I also argue in this thesis that the changing nature in the role of state is caused by the moral legitimacy crisis of the state. The state has seldom faced moral legitimacy crisis. The legitimacy crisis of the state is tied to how the incumbents acceded to power, and how the incumbent party uses the state institutions to perpetrate political violence against the targets. The legitimacy crisis has unfolded in various ways, and mode of transition of power have played a crucial role. First, when there was no caretaker government provision to supervise the election, the incumbent party always won the election, reportedly through manipulation. Therefore, the elections did not reflect the mandate of the citizens and thus the moral rights of the incumbent party to rule the country remained contentious and was challenged by the political opposition, the press, and the citizens. Second, when there was a caretaker government provision, and the incumbent party won the election through comparatively freer and fairer elections, the incumbent party used the state institutions, i.e. the law enforcement agencies, to perpetrate

violence against the political oppositions, the dissenters, and the press. Besides, various wings of the incumbent political party have also perpetrated violence against the citizens in a collaborative manner with the state agents reportedly enjoying impunity. Therefore, in both cases, the state faced a moral legitimacy crisis, of various degrees. I argue that to maintain the claim of legitimacy, the state has become more coercive, relied more on violence, used an array of instruments against various social and political actors, and the scope of violence has expanded over time.

## **Methodology**

The nature of the research questions that have been presented earlier requires the thesis to be interpretive in the method. Particularly, the analysis is in a case study format (Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2006) that interprets the nature and scope of the state perpetrated or supported political violence since the inception of Bangladesh with a particular focus on the 2012-2018 period. It is necessary because, despite supposedly having a monopoly over violence, why the state is considered as ‘perpetrator’ or ‘supporter’, or political violence requires critical interpretation. Studying violence in the interpretive method is not new. Fujii’s (2009) study on the communal genocide in Rwanda interprets the social context and group dynamics behind an individual’s motivation in the recruitment and participation in the genocide. The interpretive method warrants the explanation of the actions carried out in a certain circumstance.

This thesis interprets the state perpetrated or supported political violence in three phases. The first phase examines the political violence from 1972 to 1990 under two periods in which Bangladesh experienced civilian authoritarianism and military

dictatorship. Since Bangladesh re-embarked on the democratic trajectory in 1991 through the fifth parliamentary election administered by CTG, and thereafter, democracy was an integral part of the political history of Bangladesh until 2011. Thus, the second phase consists of the timeline between 1991 and 2011. In the second phase, the thesis examines how the state perpetrated or supported political violence when government changed hands through regular national parliamentary elections. Although the caretaker government provision was repealed in the parliament in 2011, the full verdict of the Supreme Court was published in 2012. Therefore, I consider 2012 as the beginning of the third phase. This change in the political landscape has brought significant change in the nature, actors, instruments, and scopes of violence. The third phase begins in 2012 and will examine the political violence perpetrated or supported by the state up to 2018.

This is a qualitative study in nature that focuses more on the interpretation of the political violence as an approach of the state through presenting various examples through certain taxonomies rather than quantifying it or numerically deducing its significance. Secondary and anecdotal data have been used to situate the nature and scope of political violence in different periods and to look for their explanation. The sources of data include books, journal articles, websites, narrative and statistical reports of national and international organizations, statements of the state institutions, news, and reports published in the various English and Bangla newspapers.

One very significant incident of political violence in Bangladesh that has not been covered in this thesis is the violence in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT). While this is a textbook example of political violence perpetrated or supported by the state against its

citizens, it remains out of the scope of this thesis due to its different dimension. The political violence in CHT is rooted in its topographical, historical, and environmental backgrounds (Mohsin, 2003) which is beyond the schema of this thesis. Although, actors of political violence in CHT include military, regional political parties in CHT, armed wings of the political parties, and some secessionist groups (Mohsin & Hossain, 2015), due to a complex relationship between the state and the actors of this violence, it remains almost untouched in this thesis. Just to keep it in record as an instance of violence, a few lines have been added in the fourth chapter.

### **Outline of the Chapters**

The first chapter lays out the research question of this thesis based on a discussion of the political background of Bangladesh, the presence of political violence in the political interaction, the engagement of state in political violence. This chapter also addresses the methodological aspect of this thesis.

The second chapter offers a literature review of the existing literature consistent with the concept of this thesis in the context of Bangladesh. Following the literature review, the chapter operationalizes some conceptual elements that have been used in this thesis. It also offers the theoretical framework under which the state perpetrated or supported political violence in Bangladesh has been interpreted in the thesis.

The third chapter categorizes the phases of political violence perpetrated or supported by the state in Bangladesh. This chapter interprets the nature and scope of state perpetrated or supported political violence in the first period of the first phase (January

1972 – 15 August 1975). It also examines the instruments used and scopes targeted in the political violence in that period.

The fourth chapter addresses the new political development in the second period of the first phase (16 August 1975 – 06 December 1990). It also interprets the nature and scope of state perpetrated or supported political violence in this period.

The fifth chapter interprets the nature and scope of state perpetrated or supported political violence in the second phase (1991 – 2011). Similar to the previous phase, it also looks at the instruments of the state that were used in political violence against the variety of scopes.

The sixth chapter offers the interpretation of the state perpetrated or supported political violence in the third phase (2012 – 2018), including its nature and scope. This chapter offers a more elaborative explanation as this period has experienced unprecedented political developments.

The seventh and final chapter interprets the changes that took place over the three periods regarding the nature and scope of the state approach towards political violence in Bangladesh as well as the instruments and scopes of violence. It also discusses why the state has changed its role towards more intensification of violence.

## **CHAPTER II: CONTEMPORARY KNOWLEDGE**

This chapter begins with literature review regarding political violence in Bangladesh. The literature review finds that violence perpetrated or supported by the state in Bangladesh is largely absent in the academic discussion. Scholars have addressed political violence in Bangladesh from various dimensions including its dynamics, taxonomy, causes, trends; however, the relation of state with violence remained absent in the discussion. This brings the second section of this chapter into the context. This section conceptually explains three key terms used in this thesis – political violence, state, and legitimacy. Following the conceptual clarification, this section contextualizes the concepts in the case of Bangladesh and understands how these concepts are convoluted, particularly, state and legitimacy. Due to the blurring boundary between state, government, and the ruling party, the government confronts the political opposition using the violent apparatus of the state. Therefore, the concept of state, and government becomes blended and approaches of state eventually becomes the approaches of the government. Therefore, in this thesis, state and government has been used interchangeably. Moreover, the concept of legitimacy has also been convoluted in case of Bangladesh. While Bangladesh as a state does not have any legitimacy crisis, the incumbent government frequently was challenged by the opposition political parties and press in terms of moral legitimacy. The moral legitimacy crisis of the government was also dealt with violence using state apparatus. Therefore, legitimacy crisis in this thesis refers to the moral legitimacy crisis of the government. This chapter also explains the theoretical framework that has been used in undertaking this thesis.



The second chapter is divided into three sections. The first section offers a systematic review of the existing literature on political violence in the context of Bangladesh. Following the literature review, the second section operationalizes some of the concepts that are relevant to this thesis. The third section explains the theoretical framework under which the state perpetrated or supported political violence in Bangladesh.

## **Literature Review**

### **Political Violence in Bangladesh**

Despite being so ubiquitous in the political history of Bangladesh, studies on political violence in Bangladesh are limited (Aziz & Razzaque, 2018). Scholars have addressed a few aspects of political violence in Bangladesh. Extant literature revolves around the causes, manifestation of political violence (Moniruzzaman, 2009), the taxonomy of political violence in Bangladesh (Parvez, 2019), factors behind the political violence in Bangladesh (Islam S., 2006). Datta (2005) studies the trends and causes of the political violence in Bangladesh perpetrated by the non-state actors, Suykens and Islam (2015) provide a descriptive statistical overview of the distribution of political violence from 2002-2013 based on time, geography, actors, and casualties. Aziz and Razzaque (2018) explore the regional variation in political violence in Bangladesh and examine the affiliation of political parties in political violence. Besides, with the emergence of Islamist militancy in Bangladesh in the last two decades, there has been an extensive academic discussion on militancy, terrorism, and violent extremism. For example, in his seminal and first of its kind of work regarding militancy in Bangladesh, Riaz (2008) explains domestic, regional, and international factors that have contributed to the rise of militancy in Bangladesh and

argues that domestic politics is one of the few factors that provide a conducive environment for militancy to thrive in Bangladesh. In these studies, violence perpetrated by non-state actors are discussed as 'political violence', while violence perpetrated by the state and its various agencies receives very little attention.

The available literature on political violence in Bangladesh can be divided into two strands that are on? political parties and state. While the literature did not explain the violence perpetrated by the state, existing works explain political violence under different dimensions. The following section reviews the literature in terms of taxonomy, dynamics, spatial distribution, actors, targets, manifestation, trends, and causes of political violence.

Parvez (2019) and Alamgir (2011) offered a taxonomy of political violence. Parvez (2019) classified political violence into three groups, which are macro, meso, and micro level of political violence in periodical constraints from 2000 to 2017. His analysis provides four significant factors behind the macro-level political violence in Bangladesh. These are dynastic and clientelist political violence rooted in patron-client relationship, construction of divergence and polarity based on the national identity in the state and the role of religion in society, closing political opportunities by the government along with coercive state responses, and the dispute over the electoral system in Bangladesh. In the meso level, the intra-party clashes, resorting to violence by the political parties as a strategy, and narrative construction of violence to justify them are identified as the factors by Parvez (2019). Lastly, he argues that in micro level, political violence is driven by the membership of individuals on the social network where the members feel a psychological pleasure of a strong collective identity to the political groups through participating in political violence.

In classifying political violence, Alamgir (2011) suggests that there two types of political violence have been identified. The first is terrorism, which is irregular and created indiscriminate casualties or caused unexpected terror among civilians. The second is general political violence that is a more routinized manifestation of political actions of the political parties.

Moniruzzaman (2009), Rahaman (2007), Alamgir (2011), Aziz & Razzaque (2018), and Islam (2011) have explained the dynamics of political violence in Bangladesh. Moniruzzaman (2009) argued that there is cyclical relationship between the inter-party political violence which leads to non-cooperation and stalemate between the ruling and the opposition party which is the outcome of deep-rooted political culture of revenge, intolerance, antagonism, and arrogance. He mainly looks at how the political parties interact during political violence and what consequence it brings. He argues that three factors were responsible for political violence in Bangladesh during the non-democratic regime between 1972-1990. First, the large number of illegal arms was at the hand of political cadres, which were non-decommissioned after the war of independence in 1971. Second, all of the members of parliaments during 1972-1975 were provided with light machine guns (LMG) for their personal safety, which contributed to building up arms culture in the politics of Bangladesh. And third, the student wing of the Jatiya Party was provided with guns to counter the political oppositions and have control over politics that contributed to the institutionalization of arms culture in Bangladesh.

Alamgir (2011), building an original data set consisting of the political violence between 2001 and 2006, argued that party power largely instigates the dynamics for

violence, and the student wings of the political parties follow their parent political parties regarding the involvement in political violence.

Islam (2011) provides a set of observations that characterizes the nature of political violence in Bangladesh. He argues that political violence has been driven by party politics, political vengeance, and interests, the parochial outlook of political leadership, corruption, and greed. The lack of legitimacy of the ruling elites and sanction of violence by the Bangladeshi state has helped in institutionalizing violence and created a vicious pattern. Besides, the perpetrators of political violence have enjoyed impunity both from the political parties and from the state. He further maintains that on the one hand, the criminalization of political parties and their nexus to local gangs has fueled political violence. On the other hand, the Islamist parties have exploited their nexus with the political parties that contributed to the rise of political violence in Bangladesh.

Rahaman's (2007) study argues that the clashes of personality cult between the heads of the two main political parties, Sheikh Hasina of Bangladesh Awami League (BAL) and Begum Khaleda Zia of Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) lead to the political violence in Bangladesh. Their personality conflicts provoke the culture of confrontational politics, and they resort to violence outside of their democratic space. As a result, they boycott parliaments and take to the streets through violent means such as Hartals.

Aziz & Razzaque (2018) argued that the symmetrical relationship between the rival political actors leads to increased political violence if the area is densely populated. They also found that district-level per capita income and the presence of influential political leaders increase political violence. Their argument also maintains that the political violence

in Bangladesh always not aimed at attaining particular political goals, or for that matter, it is also not always a collective action of a particular political group.

Suykens & Islam (2015), Alamgir (2011), Aziz & Razzaque (2018) also explored the spatial distribution of political violence in Bangladesh. Suykens and Islam (2015) provide an overview of the distribution of political violence in 2002-2013 based on time, geography, actors, and casualties. It offers descriptive statistics of the political violence events taken place between 2002 and 2013. They find that Dhaka, Chittagong, Rajshahi, and Khulna have been hotbeds of political violence in this period. Aziz and Razzaque (2018) explore the spatial variation in political violence in Bangladesh and found that the degree of political violence is subject to political competitiveness and populous areas. The study of Alamgir (2011) regarding the spatial distribution of political violence suggests that it takes place mostly in the capital, Dhaka, while the divisional districts also experience a relatively higher degree of violence than the non-divisional districts.

Suykens & Islam (2015), Rahman et al. (2018) explore the actors of violence in Bangladesh. Suykens & Islam (2015) show that law-enforcement agencies, the two main political parties the BAL and the BNP, and the student wing of the BAL, the Bangladesh Chattra League (BCL), have become the top perpetrators of political violence in Bangladesh. In a different manner, Rahman et al. (2018) examine the involvement of street children in the political violence in light of the 10<sup>th</sup> national parliamentary election in 2014. They conclude that the children are both the perpetrators and victims of political violence patronized by the adults in exchange for their day-to-day survival. They explained that the increasing number of political violence during the election in 2014 physically and mentally

affected the street children, and they have also been exploited by social media. While their direct involvement includes hurling bombs, exploding cocktails, torching vehicles, the indirect involvement includes carrying arms and explosives, spying, and providing information for the political parties. Regarding the victims of political violence, Alamgir (2011) finds that approximately 70% of political violence is targeted to the main three political parties and students, while the rest of the 30% is targeted to the small political parties, and non-political civilians.

Moniruzzaman (2009) found seven ways of manifestation of political violence in Bangladesh. These were: attacks on political programs, intra-party factionalism, protest activities such as Hartal, strike, electoral violence, non-cooperation by political oppositions, tender, and political revenge. He further argued that political violence in Bangladesh is driven by mutual antagonism, personality conflicts, and leadership arrogance.

Datta (2005), and Parvez (2019) explored the trends and causes of political violence in Bangladesh. Parvez (2019) argued that the trends and patterns of political violence in Bangladesh follow three essential features. First, there is an upward trend in political violence in Bangladesh. Second, he acknowledged that the national and local election periods are more prone to violence. Third, he also highlighted the pattern of political violence during the post-election period that shows an increasing number of attacks on the minority after the election. He addressed that while the extant literature deals with the trends, patterns, and manifestation of political violence in Bangladesh, their explanation does not deal with the legitimization and complex interaction process of violence. While Parvez outlined a number of reasons behind these three levels of political violence

including dynastic and clientelist politics, construction and divergence on the question of identity and the role of religion, closing political opportunities, and coercive state response, dispute over electoral system, etc., his analysis did not respond to the nature of state perpetrated/supported political violence.

Datta (2005) also gave a detailed account of trends and causes of political violence in Bangladesh, which is qualitative in nature and explains the cultural narrative of trends of political violence. According to her, the intolerant political culture and military intervention in politics is mostly responsible for political violence in Bangladesh. She addressed that much of the contemporary literature on political violence has only focused on one type of political violence, which is religious extremism. However, she acknowledges that social violence and religious extremism do feed into the broader context of political violence in Bangladesh. Because of the targets and manifestations of violence, attempt to achieve a specific political agenda. She identifies various types of political violence, including political killings and coups, street agitations, sectarian violence in Islamic communities, and religious extremism. Datta, in her work, identified violence perpetrated by the non-state actors as she referred to the 'deteriorating law and order' as a 'major threat to domestic stability.'

Similar to Datta's idea of political violence in the context of Bangladesh, in the academic analyses and reports published in the media, violence perpetrated by the non-state actors, including but not limited to political parties, their activists, their various wings, against their political rivals, against the law enforcement agencies are identified and discussed as political violence. Although these studies address various actors and causes of

political violence, they are inadequate in addressing how the state is a central actor in political violence. Therefore, this gap in the literature needs to be filled in order to understand what role the state plays in political violence.

### **Operationalizing Some Key Concepts**

There are three key concepts that have been used in this thesis. These are political violence, state, and legitimacy. While the conceptual understanding of these three key terms needs to be addressed, we should also be cognizant about the contextualization of these concepts in the case of Bangladesh. It is because the conceptual understanding of political violence is multi-dimensional, so much so too for the concept of state and legitimacy. Therefore, it is necessary that I address the conceptual understanding of these key terms while I explain the meaning of these concepts as I have imparted in this thesis.

### **Political Violence**

While the term ‘political violence’ sounds too easy to understand, there is a lack of agreement among scholars on the nature, scope, and actors of it. Therefore, it is quite challenging to define political violence in a universal manner. The conceptual disagreement includes both its formulation and the extent of its manifestation. Political scientists have defined various acts of violence perpetrated by various state and non-state actors as ‘political violence.’ Violent acts considered as political violence include civil war (Kalyvas, 2006), genocide (Jones, 2016), war (Hughes, 2016), social movement (Porta, 2016), terrorism (Blakeley, 2016), mass killing (Staub, 2016), ‘guerilla conflict, paramilitary conflict, political assassinations, armed conflict between political parties, rape and sexual abuse as political act, forced pregnancy/sterilization (Moser & Clark, 2001, pp. 36 in Darby,



2016)' etc. In order to operationalize the term political violence in the context of Bangladesh and explore its trajectory, we should first look at what is meant by the term political violence, and how we can situate Bangladesh within the discourse of political violence.

One of the main challenges of studying political violence is that it has been studied broadly within two traditions; they are terrorism, and social movement (Porta, 2016). The entire range of political violence or different types of political violence have been situated within these two broad categories. Therefore, the radius of political violence has been all-inclusive. Darby (2016) noted that 'existing definitions of political violence tend to be all-inclusive rather than precise.' Porta also acknowledges the ambiguity : 'Not only is the operationalization of political violence complicated, but the empirical phenomena that are placed under the label of political violence are so broad.....' (Porta, 2013, p. 6).

Despite acknowledging these ambiguities and lack of agreement, authors have operationalized the concept in their studies. Porta (2016) defines political violence as the repertoires of collective action involving the use of physical force, causing damage to the adversary to achieve political aims.

Tilly (2003), who has dealt with the issue of political violence in several of his works, provides three characteristics of collective violence. These are immediate infliction of damages to person/object, involving at least two persons as perpetrators, and the presence of at least partial coordination among the perpetrators. Tilly's characteristics give two answers that the damage will be to person or property, and the perpetrators will be

more than one. Therefore, his definition of political violence is it is 'not simply individual aggression writ large' (Tilly, 2003, p. 4).

Kalyvas's definition of political violence 'deliberate infliction of harm on people' (Kalyvas, 2006, p. 19) with an intention 'to shape the behavior of a targeted audience by altering the expected value of particular action' (Kalyvas, 2006, p. 26) does not address the minimum number of perpetrators in political violence. Darby (2016) discusses four propositions to satisfy a definition of political violence. If we combine the propositions, the definition becomes that the violence has to take place within a political entity that may (or may not) be inspired/strengthened by international movements with the organized use of violence to achieve political aims.

In situating political violence vis-a-vis state, Patrick O'Neil can serve as a point of departure. Patrick O'Neil (2010, p. 195), brings the state into the discussion although his definition leaves the state outside. He defines political violence as "politically motivated violence outside of state control." In this definition, for an action to be considered political violence two conditions need to be met. The first is having a political motive, and the second is its appearance beyond the control of the state. Therefore, the situation which is or seems to be beyond the control of the state may warrant political violence. But whether it is perpetrated by the state or against the state remains a critical question. A similar understanding can be noticed in the definition which says, "violence should be considered political if and when it aims at the state" (Wilke, Hippler, & Zakar, 2011, p. 37). According to this definition, whether the violence may or may not have a 'political' aim, it can still be political violence if it is aimed at the state. On the other hand, if two political groups are

engaged in violence but do not aim at the state or confront the state, the violence may not be considered as political violence.

This brings us to the stage as to how we should contextualize the political violence in the case of Bangladesh. Political violence in the context of Bangladesh has both theoretical similarities and dissimilarities to political violence as discussed in the literature. Authors have tried to situate political violence in the context of Bangladesh in multiple ways. Aziz and Razzaque (2018) state that political violence in Bangladesh is significantly different from the definitions found in extant literature as political violence in Bangladesh is always not directed to achieve a specific political goal by the collective action of any particular political group. Suykens and Islam (2015) operationalize political violence in their data set based on two factors: that it has to be violent, meaning at least one person should be injured/raped/abducted/held hostage or at least a property should be destructed, and that it should have an explicit political dimension meaning the violent event should involve members of at least one clearly defined political group/party/affiliated organization/Islamist organization/rebel group. Aziz and Razzaque (2018) quote Sattar (2008) and define political violence as an act of “street-level small scale violence directed to establish local supremacy in order to reap financial benefit.”

Having these contextualized definitions, we can understand that political violence in Bangladesh is a violent event that takes place by the members of political parties/groups/organizations with a view to achieving any political objective or secure any political concession or compromise which are not attainable without the use of force or doing damage to persons or property. Hence, political violence in Bangladesh is an

instrument of power exercise to gain some political goals. In this backdrop, since the state has the utmost authority of power exercise over its citizens, this thesis will define political violence as *'an organized act of violence through the use of physical force to inflict damage on the target to achieve a certain political aim.'*

## **State**

What is a state? What constitutes a state? These questions have been discussed at length in the political science and thus, generated a wide variety of answers. Consequently, the concept of state has become an issue of debate. Political scientists have explained the concept of state and defined it in various ways, such as coercion (Weber, 2002), sovereignty (Hobbes, 1983), legitimacy (Locke, 1990), hegemony (Gramsci, 1971), protection (Tilly, 1985), etc.

However, the most widely used definition of state is drawn from the work of Weber (2002) which says that a state is an organization that maintains the monopoly of violence over a defined territory. Weber's definition of the state provides four elements that are crucial in understanding the concept of a state. The elements are organization, maintenance, monopoly of violence, and a territory. All of these four elements are connected to each other, and one cannot operate without the other. Because, if there is an organization with the monopoly of violence that it tries to maintain, it must have a defined territory to exercise its monopoly. On the other hand, if the state is unable to maintain its monopoly over violence, in its defined territory, the state becomes fragile. Civil wars can be cases of reference. Therefore, all of these four elements are essential components of the state.

O'Neil (2010, p. 34) argues that state is "a set of institutions that seeks to wield the most force within a territory, establishing order and deterring challengers from inside and out." So, the state, or for that matter, the organization is built upon several institutions. The institutions are the entities that have the power of domination on their citizens. Weber calls them as administration. He argues that the administration needs to have two resources. One is goods or materials of domination, and the other is staffs of domination. A combination of both of these resources built the set of institutions that regulates society. O'Neil (2018) argues that the institutions include ministries, office, army, police, etc. which help to create and implement policies and resolve conflict. Therefore, leaders and policies may change over time, but the institutions or for that matter, the state remains stable.

Tilly (1985) has seen the state as a protection racket whose initial idea was to protect its citizens in exchange for taxation and maintaining the internal order. The state provides security, maintains order, defend the citizens from the rivals, settle internal disputes in exchange for money taken from the citizens (Tilly, 1985). The citizens who do not pay or do not abide by the rules imposed by the racketeers are also punished.

Rotberg (2018, p. 49), on the other hand, views state through the lenses of performance or capacity that rests on legitimacy. In his view, the state is a combination of performance and legitimacy. He argues that state is a deliverer of political goods that are "security, education, health services, economic opportunity, environmental surveillance, a legal framework of order and a judicial system to administer it, and a fundamental infrastructural requirement such as roads and communication facilities" (Rotberg, 2018, p. 50). Therefore, if there is a deterioration in providing these services to the citizens, the

state begins to lose its legitimacy. The performances are carried out by the institutions. So, if the institutions are weak, then the performance weakens, legitimacy decays.

In the discussions on state, force remains a central issue. A state has to have the capacity of enforcement. Whether it is political goods, perpetration of violence, maintaining order, or anything else, the state is supposed to have the capacity of enforcement. A state may have various institutions that are entitled to enforcement of policies, laws, etc. As this thesis deals with political violence, the institutions representing state would provide those institutions that are entrusted with enforcement of law and maintenance of order in Bangladesh such as police, paramilitary forces, special security forces, and military. The law enforcing agencies are directed by the executive branch of the government. Because, as we consider the definition of state-provided by Weber, the law enforcement agencies have the monopoly of violence to exercise on the citizens of Bangladesh to maintain order.

Therefore, in light of the above discussion based on the operationalization of state vis a vis violence, state will refer to those entities that perpetrate violence using the state apparatus. As we will see below, the boundary between the state and the government is blurred in the case of Bangladesh. Therefore, the incumbent government has used the law enforcement agencies, the military in various capacities against the political opposition, the press, and the dissenters. The law enforcement agencies, and the military have also served the government and perpetrated violence as directed by the government. Hence, in this thesis, the concept of state will refer to the incumbent government, the law enforcement agencies, and the military as they all have the jurisdiction to exercise violence.

## **Legitimacy**

State legitimacy refers to the state's ability to obtain the population's consent to the state's claim to rule (Deutsches Institut für Entwicklungspolitik, 2019). It denotes the ability of the state to obtain the consent of the population to the state's dominance (Deutsches Institut für Entwicklungspolitik, 2019). According to Gilley (2006, p. 500), legitimacy depends on the treatment of the 'citizens as rightfully holding and exercising political power.' He also maintains that it is 'an endorsement of the state by citizens at a moral or normative level' (Gilley, 2006, p. 502). In this thesis, I operationalize legitimacy as the consent of people as well as the approval of the political oppositions towards the state to rule the citizens. However, the legitimacy of the state does not necessarily mean the legitimacy of the government. Because the government may change, but the state that is represented by a set of institutions does not change very quickly. In a democratic country, there is a clear separation between the state and the politicians, parties, and government (Muller, Jukam, & Seligson, 1982). Gilley (2006) argues that legitimacy is a significant determinant of both the structure and operation of states. It also indicates whether the state is losing support or gaining support. Because the state rests on the consent of the people that uphold the stateness of these institutions. Gilley (2006) also maintains that the boundary between the government and the state becomes blurry when the government captures the state. It is when the government oversteps the bounds of holding office, and in such instances, leaders, parties, and governments become 'indistinguishable' from the state. Therefore, in such a case, the legitimacy of the state primarily denotes the legitimacy of the government. Bangladesh is a case in point of this blurring boundary due to the entanglement of state institutions and the party government. Except for a brief challenge to

the legitimacy of the state as a sovereign entity in between 1972 and 1975, Bangladesh did not face legitimacy crisis as a state. However, since 1972, the moral legitimacy of the incumbent government to rule the country was always challenged. I use the term 'moral legitimacy' in this thesis in opposed to 'legal legitimacy'. While legal legitimacy literally means that an entity is legally legitimate, moral legitimacy means that the entity is not morally or ethically legitimate despite having legal legitimacy. In case of Bangladesh, despite the incumbent government had legal legitimacy, meaning that their authority to rule the citizens was legally legitimized according to the constitution or ordinance of the President, the incumbent government faced challenges from the political opposition and the press about their moral rights to rule the citizens. The opposition political parties continued to question the moral legitimacy of the government under different political circumstances. The legitimacy crisis of a government can be understood through different means. For example, according to Deutsches Institut fur Entwicklungspolitik (2019), there are three indicators of legitimacy. These are freedom of the press, human rights, and the number of asylums granted to citizens of a state. It denotes that in a state where legitimacy is low, the freedom of the press would be curtailed; human rights will be violated, which indicates a potential rise in political violence. Gilley (2006) argues that in a state where legitimacy is in crisis, the state uses more of its resources to maintain rule and less of its to effective governance. As such, in this thesis, the moral legitimacy crisis can be seen when an incumbent government displays intolerance towards the political opposition, the criticisms published by the press, and the disagreements expressed by its citizens. In case of Bangladesh, due to the entanglement of state, government and the incumbent ruling party, the concept of legitimacy is also convoluted. The incumbent government has used the state



apparatus to confront the opposition political parties. The opposition political parties challenged the moral rights of the incumbent government to rule the country. The government used the law enforcement agencies and the specialists of violence to confront these challenges. As such, in this thesis, legitimacy of the state refers to the moral legitimacy of the government. Therefore, the legitimacy crisis of the state will refer to the moral legitimacy crisis of the government. Due to the blurring boundary between the state and the government, the thesis uses the terms 'state' and 'government' interchangeably. In this thesis, the state denotes the incumbent government.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **State and Violence**

The state is the only legitimate authority to use physical force against its citizens (Weber, 2002). Weber bolstered his argument drawing on Trotsky that “[e]very state is founded on force.” He sees force as a means ‘specific’ to the state (Weber, 2002). He entitles state with the ‘monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force’ where the use of force can be implemented by certain institutions or individuals who have the ‘right’ as permitted by the state. He argues, “the relation between state and violence is an especially intimate one” (Weber, 2002). Therefore, according to Weber, the state is the only legitimate authority that can use violence. Although he provides three sources of legitimacy for an authority based on tradition, charisma, and legality, I take legality as the legitimate source of authority for a modern state that enables a state to use violence rightfully. But upon whom the state will exercise its authority? Weber thinks that violence begets a relation between dominant and dominated. He states, “The state is a relation of men dominations men, a relation supported by means of legitimate (i.e., considered to be legitimate) violence. If the

state is to exist, the dominated must obey the authority claimed by the powers that be” (Weber, 2002, p. 14) Weber provides a feature of the authority of the state that it has a legitimate power that authorizes the state to dominate its citizen. He also suggests that the domination will be commissioned to the ‘bearers of legitimate power’ that is in a modern state, ‘the administration.’ Therefore, by virtue of being the legitimate authority having the legitimate power, the state can use violence on its citizens through its administration. Hence, in this study, theoretically, the state will be understood as a legitimate entity that has the monopoly of violence while the administration will represent the state in exercising violence on its citizens by virtue of having the power.

### **Why State Resorts to Violence**

The relationship between violence and power has been a subject of extensive academic debates for a long time. Questions such as what the purpose of violence is, why a state would implement violence on its citizens, have been discussed at length. The brief political history of Bangladesh demonstrates that the Bangladeshi state has resorted to violence as an option to control the citizens and counter their dissent. According to the Weberian concept of violence, power comes with violence. Violence is essential in politics because politics distributes power among various stakeholders. Therefore, to retain a larger share of power, politics lets violence decide as to who would be the most powerful. As the state is the most powerful authority, it also is the most violent. Therefore, the presence of violence means the presence of power.

Hannah Arendt fundamentally contradicts the position and argues that there is an erroneous ‘consensus’ among political scientists regarding the relationship between power

and violence. She challenges the consensus that- “violence is nothing more than the most flagrant manifestation of power” (Arendt, 2002, p. 25). As an example of those who have seen this unilinear relationship between power and violence, she cites Mill - “All politics is a struggle for power; the ultimate kind of power is violence” (Arendt, 2002, p. 25). Arendt’s disagreement and her explanation are essential elements in understanding the relationship. However, before we explore Arendt further, it is necessary to examine where Mill and Weber’s positions converge.

Weber saw politics as “striving to share power or striving to influence the distribution of power either among states or among groups within a state” (Weber, 2002, p. 13). Within this frame, wherever there is a manifestation of power, there is a manifestation of violence or vice versa. Equating power with violence, thus, means violence is inherent in politics. As the state is entitled the most legitimate power and has the monopoly of violence, therefore, the implementation of violence by the state is in tandem with its concept of retaining power.

However, Arendt questions if the disappearance of violence will mean the disappearance of power. Although the term ‘power’ would need a great deal of discussion to understand how it is seen by the political theorists, nevertheless, to put it simply, power is an ability of an entity to command another, and the commanded obey the will of the commandant. However, Arendt disagrees on the notion of ‘effectiveness of command’ as she puts, “If the essence of power is the effectiveness of command, then there is no greater power than that which grows out of the barrel of a gun” (Arendt, 2002, p. 26). So, if not the gun, then what would make the commanded (citizens) obey the command of the state?

Arendt answers that it is the consent/obedience of the citizens who would make them obey the state or the political institutions. The source of obedience is the 'support' of people, in Madison's language "All governments rest on opinion" (Arendt, 2002, p. 27), which Arendt sees as the real power of the state rather than violence. This is where Arendt digresses from the concept of violence, as explained by Weber. Arendt thinks that political institutions decay "as soon as the living power of the people ceases to uphold them" (Arendt, 2002, p. 27), and therefore she argues that "violence appears when power is in jeopardy" (Arendt, 2002, p. 34). Because, as long as the obedience is guaranteed for the state or for that matter, for the political institutions, violence is not necessary. But whenever the support for the political institutions is not guaranteed, the obedience of the citizen is uncertain; the state implements violence to regain the power. She explains the relationship between power and violence: "In a contest of violence against violence the superiority of the government has always been absolute, but this superiority lasts only so long as the power structure of the government is intact – that is, so long as commands are obeyed, and the army or police forces are prepared to use their weapons. When this is no longer the case, the situation changes abruptly" (Arendt, 2002, p. 29). Therefore, power is an absolute quality that does not require violence for its existence or legitimacy. But violence is required when the power does not work effectively. Violence then becomes a means to an end, which is power.

The state wants to retain power as much as possible through legitimacy. Legitimacy enables the state to keep order in the country. However, when legitimacy is in question, the power becomes vulnerable, and this is where violence appears. Therefore, "power is true of the essence of all government, but violence is not" (Arendt, 2002, p. 31). As violence can be

used in any extra-ordinary circumstance, it sometimes is justified, for example, against a subversion. However, as Arendt puts, “[v]iolence can be justifiable, but it never will be legitimate” (Arendt, 2002, p. 32), meaning the eruption of violence demonstrates a lack of legitimacy in power. So, the takeaway for Arendt’s argument is that the state implements violence when it loses support from its citizens.

In this thesis, I will extend her conclusion further and contextualize it in the case of Bangladesh; I will argue that, if the state fears losing support or legitimacy, it implements violence as an instrument on its citizens to coerce support or at least to suppress dissent.

### **How to Explain the Violence Perpetrated or Supported by State**

Although why violence appears as an instrument of state is now understood from the perspective of Hannah Arendt, it requires us to explain how violence takes place. Or in other words, how does a state implement violence against the background that its power has eroded or is subject to dissent. According to Davenport, “researchers have paid far more attention to the evils done against governments (and citizens) by dissidents, rebels, and terrorists than to the evils done by presidents, the police, military, secret service, national guard, and death squads against those within their territorial jurisdiction” (Davenport, 2007, p. 1). Davenport terms the violence by the state as ‘repression.’ I take it as a similar meaning to violence because repression is cheaper than accommodation when it comes to subdue the dissent. Although repression is a kind of coercion, however, all kinds of coercion are not repression (deMeritt, 2016). Because the government may use coercion in order to maintain law and order, punish criminals, prevent societal violence, etc. Therefore, there should be a distinction about which acts would be regarded as repression.

Subduing behavior by the state in various circumstances can be considered as repression (deMeritt, 2016) such as if the freedom of speech, assembly, association, travel, and press are subject to state subjugation when the physical integrity and security of a citizen is compromised by the state through extrajudicial killing, torture, disappearance, imprisonment for political views or dissent, etc.

Davenport's definition of repression includes "harassment, surveillance/spying, bans, arrests, torture, and mass killing by government agents and/or affiliates within their territorial jurisdiction" (Davenport, 2007, p. 1). We need to look at two specific aspects of this definition. First, what is actually violence and what is meant by the affiliates of the government. Davenport (2007) borrows Goldstein's definition in defining repression or violence as "the actual or threatened use of physical sanctions against an individual or organization, within the territorial jurisdiction of the state, for the purpose of imposing a cost on the target as well as deterring specific activities and/or beliefs perceived to be challenging to government personnel, practices or institutions" (Davenport, 2007, p. 2). Therefore, the state will confront any activities, beliefs which are challenging to the government, or to simplify it, challenging to the power of the state within the territory of state either through the government agent or affiliates of the government. The tools of government agents are torture, disappearance, imprisonment, extra-judicial execution, mass killing, surveillance, etc.

While we understand the government agents as police, military, law enforcement agencies, secret service, national guards, death squads, etc., the affiliates of the government

may also be understood as government affiliates according to Kalyvas's (2006) explanation.

For the affiliates of the government in targeting citizens and executing violence, we can look at how Kalyvas (2006) explained the causes and dynamics of violence. Although he explores it in cases of civil war, some of the elements of his theory are also well applicable in the case of Bangladesh. We can contextualize and explain the approaches of the state towards the nature of political violence in Bangladesh by a part of his framework. Against the prevailing concept of 'greed and grievance,' collective emotion, ideology, and culture, he proposes that violence has its own dynamics with particular objectives, which he introduces as 'selective violence.' He defines selective violence as it 'entails the personalization of violence and requires information that is asymmetrically distributed between political actors and individual civilians' (Kalyvas, 2006, p. 173) This is a result of a transaction between the political actors and individuals. Kalyvas sees this transaction as a 'joint process.' In a civil war, as Kalyvas argues, there should be armed combat between parties where one party would try to take control of the population in order to outrun the other party. In his view, the parties are 'rival.' In such circumstances, the parties try to solicit information in various methods to identify the target and execute selective violence.

As the violence becomes personalized in this context, the role of individuals besides the state becomes quite significant. The individual engages in collaboration with the state. It is a 'survival tactic for both the political actors and the civilians.' Although Kalyvas sees this collaboration as support in case of the civil war, the identification process is aimed at the insurgents. I contextualize the support in the case of Bangladesh and suggest that there

are three reasons of support for collaboration: 'coercion', 'economic motivation,' and 'revenge'.

In the case of Bangladesh, I examine the state as a party and executioner of violence against its citizens, where the state tries to identify its target for selective violence. Kalyvas proposes two ways that are used to identify targets for selective violence. In my research, I suggest that the violence implemented by the state in Bangladesh is selective in nature, and thus it follows the identification process for targeting citizens as presented by Kalyvas. He introduces 'information' and 'denunciation' as the two tools which are used to identify targets.

Kalyvas proposes three significant sources of information, which are material indices, violent extraction, and consensual provision. To build a framework to explain the state approaches towards political violence, I take violent extraction and consensual provision as sources of information. In words of Kalyvas, "Violent extraction comes in many forms. Intimidation, blackmail, and bribes work better in urban environments" (Kalyvas, 2006, p. 175) Intimidation and blackmail will work as a source of information because these instill fear in the minds of an individual and these can generate support or obedience (as Arendt explained its lacking) for the state as these appear as a coercive tool of the state. As the state has the monopoly of violence, it can coerce its citizens and intimidation and blackmail are two forms of it. Kalyvas explains it as 'coercion' which creates support for the political actor, or for that matter, state. On the other hand, bribery is an 'economic motivation' as introduced by Kalyvas, which can motivate an individual to support the political actor and supply information for identifying the targets. The second source of



information is a consensual provision where an individual supplies information to the political actor voluntarily. Although Kalyvas sees it through the human informer or human intelligence, I will also couple it with the state intelligence because the state intelligence is in consensus with the political actor even before the human informer shows their compliance. Therefore, besides human informers, state intelligence plays a great deal of significance as a source of information.

The other tool of identification is denunciation as Kalyvas puts “denunciation leading to selective violence will be most likely where one actor exercises dominant but incomplete control” (Kalyvas, 2006, p. 174) It is therefore aimed at victimizing the target to threaten his morality and thus try to regain control or power. Since, the process of selective violence entails the privatization of violence, individual plays a great deal of role in denunciation. The privatization of violence may even lead to false denunciation, as Kalyvas thinks, “individuals are tempted to settle private and local conflicts” (Kalyvas, 2006, p. 173). He classifies denunciation into two categories, political and malicious. These can be seen as motivation towards denunciation. The political motivation often comes from party allegiance, loyalty to the political actor. This may not entirely be caused by personal conflict but may cause political revenge. On the other hand, malicious motives are driven by solely individual dispute where the denouncer use the political actor to settle his own conflict under the umbrella of selective violence by the state. This is ‘private, manipulative, and interested,’ as seen by Kalyvas. It can originate from any individual, family, village, or any more substantial cleavage. This type of support towards the state can be seen as an attempt to seek ‘revenge’ as Kalyvas sees it as a reason for collaboration. While I take the concept of privatization of violence as explained by Kalyvas, this thesis will see the privatization of

violence in a more specific way. Narrowing down the concept, privatization of violence will refer in this thesis to the use of violence in order to gain personal benefit using the advantage of monopoly of violence. The following chart may help to navigate through the proposed theoretical framework.

Why	<b>Threat/ Fear of threat to the power</b>	
Actor	Government Agent	Government Affiliates
Type	Coercion	Collaboration and Privatization of Violence
Instruments	Arrest, Torture, Harassment, Enforced Disappearance, etc.	Information, Denunciation

*Table 1: State: Monopoly of Violence*

To summarize the framework built on the basis of Weber, Arendt, Davenport, and Kalyvas's work to understand the nature of state towards political violence, I take state has a monopoly of violence over its citizens. But state illegitimately implements violence when the state thinks its power or control over citizen is lost or state fears of losing it. In such circumstances, the state exercises selective violence and targets its citizens with the help of state coercive apparatus and individuals. On the one hand, the state uses its state agents to execute violence; on the other hand, the state exchanges the authority of violence with individuals in exchange for information to target its citizens. Individuals collaborate with the state in identifying the targets and implementing violence under three circumstances, which are coercion, economic motivation, and revenge. The state selects the targets based on information and denunciation. Information is gathered from two sources, which are

violent extraction and consensual provision. State coerces the individual for information through violent extraction, whereas other individuals and state intelligence voluntarily supply information due to consensual provision. Bribery works as an economic motivation for individual collaboration with the process of violence of the state. Denunciation also has political and personal motives where the privatization of violence plays a significant role either in the form of loyalty to the political actor or in the form of personal revenge. Whatever the case is, the state implements violence on its citizens whenever the state thinks it is losing control, or it will lose control over its citizens.

### **CHAPTER III: UNFOLDING VIOLENCE**

Incidences of political violence in Bangladesh can be divided into three different phases based on the country's political history. The period between 1972 and 1990 can be labeled as the first phase. This phase began in 1972, immediately after the independence, with the hope for peaceful politics. However, tumultuous political developments over the subsequent two decades faded the hope and various political actors began to operate within the violent domain of politics.

In 1991, with the fall of military dictator General Hussain Muhammad Ershad, Bangladesh entered into a new democratic era which marks the beginning of the second phase that continued to 2011. Similar to 1972, it was expected that the politics of Bangladesh will enjoy peace and harmony in the coming years.

However, the culture of political violence sustained, and various actors continued to use violence for political gains. Except the brief interregnum between 2007 and 2008, Bangladesh experienced a regularity in the national parliamentary election during the second phase. It was a departure from the first phase, when elections were not held regularly, the interregnum between 2007 and 2008 disrupted the national parliamentary election and delayed the election for almost two years. This brief interregnum period was ruled by a caretaker government; however, there was a strong influence of military in the government. While the caretaker government in this period was civilian, Ghoshal (2009) argues that the main source of power behind the interim government was the military. This brief interregnum ended with the 9<sup>th</sup> national parliamentary election in 2008.

In these two phases, 1972-1990, and 1991 - 2011, political violence can be explained as a means to suppress political opponents. Different political parties and military dictators occupied power through various ways including democratic and undemocratic. Despite the differences, the intention to remain in state power has driven the incumbent to resort to violence in various occasions.

It has been mentioned in chapter one that in order to harmonize the transition of power through parliamentary elections, the provision of caretaker government was introduced through consensus among the political parties and later was incorporated in the constitution through the thirteenth amendment. This provision characterizes the necessity of the second phase between 1991 and 2011. Beginning in 1991, all the national parliamentary elections were conducted under the caretaker government. However, on 10 May 2011, the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court of Bangladesh provided a divided verdict to abrogate the provision of the Caretaker Government system from the constitution with a scope to organize the following two national parliamentary elections. Later, BAL led overwhelming majority in the parliament revoked the provision of the Caretaker Government system from the constitution through the fifteenth amendment on 30 June 2011 despite the fact that the full verdict of the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court was not published then. The president also approved the fifteenth amendment on 3 July 2011. The full verdict came out on 16 September 2012. Although the Apex Court opined that the next two elections could be held under the caretaker government and the BNP led opposition in the parliament opposed the amendment, the next two national parliamentary elections were not held under this system. As a result, the ruling party had excessively rigged the elections and stayed in power.

Against this above-mentioned political background, it is essential to explore the nature and scope of political violence classifying this time as a separate phase. Therefore, the time between 2012 and 2018 consists the third phase of this study. The third phase marks a distinct stand in this study given that there has been regular elections which is unlike to the first phase, however, the regular elections were not held under the Caretaker Government system, which is also unlike to the second phase.

In summary, the first phase is from 1972 to 1990, the second phase is from 1991 to 2011, and the third phase is from 2012 to 2018. The following sections discuss the nature, scope, instruments, and scopes of violence perpetrated or supported by the state in the first phase.

### **First Phase (1972-1990)**

It is important to periodize the first phase of political violence into two parts given that the nature and scope of political violence perpetrated by state varied to a significant extent. Therefore, based on the nature and actor of political violence, the first phase is divided into two periods. The first period is from January 1972 to 15 August 1975, the date of military coup d'état. The day marks the assassination of the President Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and military's overt involvement in Bangladeshi politics. The second period is from 16 August 1975 to 6 December 1990. 6 December 1990 marks the end of military rule through the resignation of President General Hussain Muhammad Ershad. The second period covers the time in which Bangladesh experienced military's involvement in politics and military dictatorship that started with the coup on 15 August. A question may appear in this context as to why I am dividing this phase into two periods instead of considering

these as two different phases. The reason lies in the context of the nature of the incumbent government as well as mode of state power transition. First, the government in the first period (1972 - 15 August 1975) was characterized by civilian authoritarianism while the government in the second period (16 August 1975 - 6 December 1990) was characterized by military government and military dominated government. The difference in the nature of government also had an effect in terms of the actors, scopes, and targets of violence. Second, although these two periods are different in character, these two periods consist a single phase (1972 – 1990) in which there was no caretaker government provision and the elections were held irregularly under the partisan government. Besides, the incumbent government also remained in the state power after every election. Therefore, despite having no caretaker government, the first phase is divided into two periods because of the difference in regime type.

### **First Period (1972-15 August 1975)**

First three and half years of Bangladesh after its independence was marred by extensive political violence. On the one hand, state perpetrated high degree of political violence against the political opposition; on the other hand, some of the opposition parties and groups resorted to political violence in order to destabilize the country (Lifschultz, 1979). Therefore, the state relied on coercion to confront the challenges. While there were law enforcement agencies engaged in perpetrating violence in the name of *implementing the government's directives to maintain law and order*, there were several other government affiliates who also took part in perpetrating violence along with the law enforcement agencies. I argue that it was a combined effort to weaken the political opposition and violent rivals in some instances.

## **Actors and Nature**

The actors of violence perpetrated by the state in the first period of the first phase were multiple including state law enforcement agencies and its affiliates. The volatile political landscape in this period set the context for perpetrating violence in order to face some emerging challenges (Ali, 2010). Three key challenges can be identified in this period that determined the nature and actor of violence perpetrated and supported by the state in this period. These are:

1. Absence of an overarching vision of the kind of polity (Ali, 2010).
2. Majoritarian tendency of the interim government led by BAL.
3. Lack of state control over administration and law and order (Riaz, 2016).

First, immediately after the war of independence, the absence of an overarching vision of the kind of polity led to the ideological difference among the political parties. The government in-exile in 1971 was led by BAL. After the war of independence, there was a disagreement about the type of interim government which would rule the country until the first election takes place. Before this disagreement, there was virtually no opposition to BAL government (Jahan, 1973). However, after the war of independence, one faction of BAL was pursuing 'social scientific revolution' emulating the leftist ideology in this new born country while the other part was pursuing the 'Indian model' of political development (Jahan, 1973). The government in-exile was restored and began to rule the country in 1972 countering the disagreement of the left ideology based political parties. BAL tried to develop a personality cult of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman as 'Mujibism' (Ahamed, 1988). Some of the leftist political parties, leaned towards then Soviet Union, including the National Awami Party (Muzaffar Ahmed) (NAP-M) and the Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB)



aligned with the Bangladesh Awami League (BAL) and supported the BAL as the interim government. On the other hand, more radical leftist political parties including the Sarbahara Party (SP), the East Pakistan Communist Party (Marxist-Leninist) (EPCP-ML), the Samyabadi Dal, and the East Bengal Communist Party (EBCP) rejected the interim government and called to continue the 'unfinished revolution' (Lifschultz, 1979). These radical leftist political parties termed the BAL government as a puppet of the 'Soviet social imperialists and Indian expansionists' (Riaz, 2005, p. 139). These political parties rejected the legitimacy of the state as a sovereign entity and advocated that the social transformation of the society can only be achieved through a proletariat revolution. The war of independence could not result in the liberation of the oppressed class of the society. Therefore, a proletariat revolution against the bourgeois and exploitative social structure was necessary to eliminate inequality. Besides, a breakaway faction of the BAL, inspired by the leftist ideology formed a new party in 1972 named Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD). The right-wing political parties were banned due to their opposition to the national independence in 1971 (Jahan, 1974). However, Ahamed (1988) argues that the idea of 'Mujibism' was neither politically appealing as a tool of mobilization nor was intellectually sound as a political ideology. On the other hand, the government did not want the radical left ideology to spread across the country. This dilemma created a politico-ideological vacuum in the country. Therefore, in the absence of a national vision of polity, the political opposition with a different political ideology started to emerge very quickly. Undeniably, the political opposition was left centric, and fragmented.

Second, the majoritarian tendency of the interim government led by the BAL also shrunk the political space for other political parties. Although the first national

parliamentary election was held in 1973, there are allegations of sporadic rigging in the election to secure the majority (Ahmed M. , 2014). The BAL secured 97.6 percent of the seats (Riaz, 2016), with 73% of the popular votes (Jahan, 1974). The Prime Minister proclaimed that there was no viable political opposition in this country (Ahmed M. , 2014).

Third, the state also had lack of control over its administration and law and order. Riaz (2016) argues that there were at least three sets of challenges that the state was facing. These are administrative, economic, and political. As a new country emerged out of a war, the civilian administration was weak. Inefficient resource management combined with corruption exacerbated the economic challenges. A large number of firearms at the hands of people along with contending ideological factions also posed a serious political challenge to the state that aggravated the law and order situation.

It is against this background that a set of actors emerged in the political landscape to perpetrate violence. The actors can be divided into two categories, as set out in the second chapter. These were the government agents and the government affiliates. The government agents include different law enforcement agencies of the state while the government affiliates include the political parties which perpetrated violence against the citizens along with the law enforcement agencies. The actors in violence specifically targeted the political opposition and the press. The state and its affiliates became reliant on coercion in a collaborative manner. The incidences of violence perpetrated during the period can be classified into two types. The first was defensive against the militaristic activities carried out by the Gono Bahini (the armed wing of JSD) and other political parties (Parvez, 2015). The Sarbahara Party (SP) carried out at least 14 incidents of attacking the police camps,

police stations and banks in 1973, most of these were successful (Morshed, 1997).

Maniruzzaman (1975, p. 121) argues,

“The real threat to political and social stability has been the radical revolutionary parties who have been trying to bring about a second revolution in Bangladesh through a mass movement as well as armed struggle. There are several radical revolutionary parties in Bangladesh-Jatio Samajtrantrik Dal (National Socialist Party), Purbo Bangla Sarbohara Party, (East Bengal Communist Party), Purbo Banglar Samannobadi Dal-Marxbadi-Leninbadi (Communist Party--Marxist-Leninist-of East Bengal), Purbo Bangla Communist Party-Marxbadi-Leninbadi (East Bengal Communist Party-Marxist-Leninist), East Pakistan Communist Party-Marxist-Leninist. Of these parties, the Jatio Samajtrantik Dal (JSD) works as the front organization of an underground party, the Bangladesh Communist League; the other parties work solely as underground parties.”

The second type of violence was offensive, that was targeted at the political opposition even if they adopted non-violent path of protests. Besides, in some instances, the state targeted the allies of the ruling party, such as the CPB, the NAP in order to quell their disagreements with the BAL (Parvez, 2015).

### **Government Agents**

The opposition political parties began to carry out violent activities whereas the leftist political ideology emerged with aim of new revolution (Morshed, 1997). Jahan (1973, p. 206) argues that ‘It was decided to root out both these categories of opposition by force’. The law enforcement agencies and the military were used to confront the political opposition. The government started to stigmatize the political opposition. Particularly, the

leftist political parties were specifically targeted by the government for stigmatization and indiscriminate suppression. While their violent activities were fueling the use of violence by the state, the head of the government, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman began to deal with the political opposition in a harsh manner. In a speech on 31 March 1972, the Prime Minister ordered to kill the 'Naxalites' on sight in a public program in Khulna Circuit House Field (Kaiser, 1995). It is essential to explain here what 'Naxalites' mean in the context of Bangladesh. The members of the Communist Party of India were originally called the Naxalites who followed the Marxist political ideology. They wanted to carry out a revolution in India in order to eliminate class discrimination and bourgeois class from the society. As the radical leftist political parties such as the East Bengal Communist Party (EBCP) called for a proletariat revolution through eliminating class discrimination and exploitative social structure, the government termed them as Naxalites and ordered the military to eliminate them (Jahan, 1973). This order sent a shockwave through the political sphere of Bangladesh and created a chilling effect. 'In April-May, military operations were conducted in a number of districts to crush the Naxalites' (Jahan (1973, p. 206). The government also termed the opposition political party activists as miscreants. Such characterization laid the ground for using violence by the state against the political opposition. It opened a door towards a violent political culture that engaged both the states and the political parties.

A separate paramilitary force named the Jatiya Rakkhi Bahini (JRB) (National Defense Force) was also established in 1972 (Riaz, 2016) ostensibly to silence the political

opposition.<sup>1</sup> The members of JRB were loyal party cadres of the BAL who were also the members of Mujib Bahini during the war of independence in 1971 (Ali, 2010). The establishment of JRB exposed two realities in Bangladesh. The first is that the existing law enforcement agencies were not capable enough to maintain law and order in the country. Second, the ruling party can abuse this state apparatus in gaining their political benefit and countering the political threats. Riaz (2016) states that there were three possible explanations that led to the establishment of JRB. These are administrative, political, and realistic. Riaz (2016, p. 50) argues, 'the administrative explanation underscores the lack of a strong law enforcement agency. Immediately after independence, the government began to reorganize law enforcement agencies such as the police, the Bangladesh Rifles, and the army. The regime was well aware of the need for a strong law enforcement agency in a post war situation where the firearms were in the hands of many different factions. The political explanation emphasizes that anticipating violent political opposition the regime felt that an organized legitimate force under the control of the party and its leaders would be a better solution. The ground reality made it imperative that a new force incorporating the freedom fighters had to be set up.' The order that established JRB was very ambiguous and could not be less specific. It was an organized armed force of 20,000 personnel with sophisticated weapons to assist civil authority in maintaining law and order, ensuring internal security, with no official authority to be accountable to.

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<sup>1</sup> The Jatiya Rakkhi Bahini Order, 1972 (President's Order no. 21 of 1972) was promulgated on 7 March 1972 with a retroactive effect from 1 February 1972

## **Government Affiliates**

The members of the law enforcement agencies, and the paramilitary force, who were tasked to address deteriorating law and order situation and confront the opposition were perpetrating wanton violence as they enjoyed impunity; while there were the government affiliates who went after the opposition and used violence as a means to achieve their goals. There were multiple groups of government affiliates; but all of them were formally or informally associated with the ruling BAL.

In 1972, the labor wing of the BAL, named the Bangladesh Sramik League, announced that they would form a volunteer force; it was named 'Lal Bahini' (Red Force). The goal, as claimed by the organizers was, to find out the collaborators of Pakistan during the war of independence in 1971. However, it soon became a menacing force, particularly for the opposition activists. Apart from the Lal Bahini, there were some other voluntary affiliates of the government named the 'Joy Bangla Bahini' (Hail Bengal Force), 'Shecchashebak Bahini' (Volunteer Force). These groups were entirely civil in nature. However, they started to perpetrate violence on the political opposition across the country. The members of these forces were reportedly trained with arms and weapons in various places (Kaiser, 1995).

It can be argued that the state's response to the emerging political challenge and its choice to be violent encouraged the political wings of BAL to form its own forces which played significant role in political violence in this period. The announcement of the establishment of JRB came on 7 March 1972 with a retroactive effect from 01 February 1972. According to Kaiser (1995), on 19 March 1972, 'Banglar Bani' the mouthpiece of the

BAL published the Sramik League's decision to form the Lal Bahini with 10,000 members. On 1 May 1972, the leaders of the Lal Bahini announced that they would carry out drive against the *anti-social* people in the country. On 4 June 1972, the leaders demanded that the government bestow the powers to the Bahini to arrest, imprison, and punish the anti-social people. On 9 September 1972, the decision to train the members of these voluntary forces were taken and the training started. However, even before the training was started, the members of these force were already engaged in large scale political violence which forced the political allies of BAL to demand that the atrocious activities of the Lal Bahini be stopped immediately.<sup>2</sup> These two forces had the implicit approval of the government (majordalimbubangla.com, 2019). The presence and activities of these two forces drew so much attention that Ambassador V F Papov asked Prime Minister Sheikh Mujibur Rahman about their relationship with the government. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman described these two forces as his left and right hands (Khan, 2018).

### **Instruments and Scopes**

The state and its affiliates have used two different types of instruments against their targets while perpetrating political violence. These are physical and legal. Targeted killing, torture, assault, enforced disappearance, rape, indiscriminate shooting, imprisonment, custodial death was among the physical instruments whereas the legal instruments were Special Power Act 1974, imposing emergency rule, and the Newspaper Declaration (Annulment) Order.

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<sup>2</sup> The Daily Sangbad, 21 July 1972

The scopes of political violence were also multifaceted and widespread as activists and leaders from both the opposition and the allies were subjected to violence. Besides, the press was a particular target of the state in terms of violence.

The government curbed the freedom of press, freedom of speech, and freedom of procession in its attempt to perpetrate violence against the various targets. The first officially state perpetrated killing of its citizens took place on the 1 January 1973. Two student supporters named Matiul Islam, a student of the University of Dhaka, and Mirza Kaderul Islam, a student of Dhaka College, were shot and killed in a procession in Dhaka (Kaiser, 1995). Interestingly, the procession was not an anti-government procession, rather it was a procession against the Vietnam war and US aggression (Riaz, 2016). Even much ironically, the victims were supporters of the NAP-M and the CPB, two parties closely allied to the BAL. The killing of these students explicitly sent a message to the political parties that any political activism against the government would be dealt with violence regardless of the political opposition or allies. Ali (2010, p. 97) argues that 'in the absence of mediatory institutions, traditions, and practice, differences were settled violently.' His argument perfectly explains the narrow political space in Bangladesh where violence was the only tool in dealing with political disagreement. While it is the first documented killing by police in Bangladesh, JRB began its violence earlier in 1972. Anyone who was anti-government was termed as anti-state by JRB and was killed. Ahmed (1983) argues that JRB has killed innumerable number of people. Therefore, naturally, the political opposition clashed with the JRB for their own survival. The JRB also allegedly engaged in abducting political activists. Siddiki (1990) mentions that JRB abducted a number of activists of the National Awami Party (Bhashani). Two high profile cases which came before the High



Court during this period demonstrate the extent of JRB's involvement with abduction and torture. In one instance in 1974, JRB kidnapped the family members of a leftist political leader Shanti Sen including his wife Aruna Sen, daughter in law Rani Sing, and one female neighbor Honufa Begum. Aruna Sen provided a statement about severe torture by JRB in the weekly Holiday on 17 March 1974. After kidnapping Aruna Sen, she was taken to a camp of JRB. She was undressed and hanged upside down before she was brutally beaten up. The next day, she was forced to swim in pond after being beaten up. While she was unable to swim, the JRB members drowned her repeatedly and beat her again. Few days after being kidnapped and tortured, Aruna Sen was taken to another JRB camp where she was strangled to near death. Later, Aruna Sen was sent to imprisonment. She was freed almost one and half month later. The kidnapping, torture, and imprisonment of Aruna Sen was also monitored by the local BAL leaders (Parvez, 2015). In 1973, an activist of JSD' student wing JSD Chatra League (JCL) named Shahjahan, was arrested by the detective branch of the Bangladesh Army. He was handed over the JRB on the day (28 December 1973) he was arrested. He was last seen on 02 January 1974 when his brother met him at the headquarter of JRB. Following that, Shahjahan was never seen. JRB tried to cover up the disappearance with a report on 31 December that the detainee has fled when he was taken to arms recovery mission. However, this statement could not be validated as the detainee was met by his brother two days after his disappearance was recorded. Kaiser argues that there has been a number of opposition political party members who became victims of enforced disappearance committed by the JRB (Kaiser, 1995).

While the political violence by the government agents and its affiliates was skyrocketing, the government introduced more legal measures to continue its repression.

In 1974, the Special Power Act was introduced (later passed in the parliament in 1975) that enabled the law enforcement agencies to arrest any person if the law enforcement agencies are satisfied that the person could commit harmful act. The Amnesty International's report of 1973-1974 mentions that it 'allows for detention of people without trial—in fact indefinitely but with certain legal safeguards—to prevent them from indulging in “anti-state activities” and from printing and publishing reports which are deemed prejudicial’ (Obaidullah, 1991, p. 15). Although the act was created to deal with those engaged in hoarding, black marketing, sabotaging, printing, possessing, or distributing any pre-judicial report, Kaiser (1995) argues that the act was abused to target the political opposition, particularly by JRB.

The political violence by JRB was criticized by various political parties and leaders. The criticism from various parts led to the amendment of the JRB Ordinance, however, only to strengthen its atrocities (Riaz, 2016). Riaz (2016, pp. 51-52) says, ‘the amendment legalized all acts committed by the JRB in the past or in the future by including the provision that no suit, prosecution, or other legal proceedings could be brought against any member of the JRB who had acted in good faith (Article 16A). The amendment also provided the JRB with the power and authority to search any place and arrest anyone without warrant (Article 8A). These provisions effectively authorized the JRB to operate beyond the reach of the law.’

A wholesale impunity and, the lack of accountability, tacitly encouraged the JRB to engage in violence. By 1974, killing, arson, torture, and rape became regular incidents of JRB (Kaiser, 1995). Ahamed (1988, p. 63) mentions, “according to one estimate, more than

6,000 political workers belonging to the radical political parties were killed by the Jatiya Rakkhi Bahini, and an equal number of them were arrested and tortured until August 1975.” The Amnesty International’s report covering 1973-1974 maintains that approximately 2,000 members of JSD are imprisoned. Besides, several journalists including Shamsul Alam, editor of the weekly Nayajug, Al Mahmud, editor of Ganakantha were also imprisoned (Obaidullah, 1991). The report covering 1974-1975 also mentions about the imprisonment about another 2,000 persons.

Press freedom was also significantly and variously curbed, both through legal measures and through violent attacks on the press. Before proclaiming the Newspaper Declaration Annulment Order in 1975, there were ample examples of intolerance of the state towards press freedom. The state had been engaged in imposing restrictions on press, sacking the editors of newspapers through executive orders, intermittently banning newspapers, imprisoning journalists, and cracking down the opposition newspaper, etc. (Riaz, 2005). Riaz (1993, p. 275) argues, ‘the final blow to the freedom of press came in June 1975 after the introduction of the one-party presidential system. The government promulgated the Newspapers (Annulment of Declaration) Ordinance 1975 by which it allowed only 4 daily newspapers to continue publication and banned the rest. All four of these newspapers were taken under the control and management of the government.’

This period of political violence came to an end on 15 August 1975 through a violent coup. Before that the country was rocked by state perpetrated and state supported political violence. Although opposition political parties and clandestine political groups also resorted to violence, and law and order severely deteriorated, it was the state agencies and

incumbent BAL's several wings which created a reign of terror. The opposition claimed that 60,000 activists have been murdered in 1973-1974. There is no way to check the veracity of the claim, but there is no denying that the high number of incidences have been reported in the press during the period. Riaz (2016) argues that government-controlled media published the incidences of violence carried out by the opposition while the opposition-controlled media published the report of political violence perpetrated by the state and the members of the ruling party.

This cycle of violence and the political culture of normalizing violence led to the assassination of a number of high-profile political leaders including President Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Mujib, once an ardent supporter of parliamentary system of government became the President through the 4<sup>th</sup> Amendment of the constitution in January 1975. The amendment banned all political parties except the newly founded Bangladesh Krishak Sramik Awami League (BKSAL). As mentioned before, in June 1975, all newspapers were banned through 'The Newspapers (Annulments of Declaration) Act, 1975' except the state-controlled four. The violent political culture nurtured by the state and its affiliates, and shrinking political space resulted in a military coup that executed the President with his family members and security details. The coup was carried out by approximately 30 junior officers of Bangladesh Army. However, all of them were not in active service during the coup (Riaz, 2016). Although they were junior officers, Riaz (2016, p. 60) argues that the plotting of coup was an open secret to the government 'although the government seems to have not taken them seriously.' The assassination took place on 15 August 1975. The assassination was carried out by a few military officers along with 300 soldiers (Kaiser, 1995). The first period of the first phase started in 1972 and ended on 15 August 1975

through this military coup. The military coup brought in new political developments in this country that resulted in the active involvement of military in politics and state power for the next fifteen years. The next chapter discusses the second period (16 August 1975 to 6 December 1990) of the first phase of political violence including its nature, actors, instruments, and scopes.

## **CHAPTER IV: CONTINUING VIOLENCE**

### **Second Period (16 August 1975- 06 December 1990)**

There was a series of coups and countercoups after the assassination of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman on 15 August 1975. Some of those coups succeeded while others were abortive. The second period is characterized with a high degree of violence perpetrated by the state and its affiliates, the state relied on violence to silence the dissenting voice through its legal and extra-legal measures. The military was also involved in perpetrating violence on the citizens of Bangladesh. The country experienced almost fifteen years of martial law from 1975 to 1990 in both military and military-dominated civilian form. Besides violence on citizens perpetrated and supported by the state and its affiliates, attempts were made by a faction of military and JSD to overthrow the government. The regime of Ziaur Rahman from 1975 to 1981 was characterized by military involvement in political violence. However, the regime of Hussain Muhammad Ershad from 1982 to 1990 did not have any direct engagement with the military. Nevertheless, the state law enforcement agencies suppressed the political opposition in both regimes. As such, the state was reliant on violence. The transfer of power from one government to another government was largely violent, led by bloodshed, and often by military coup except for the transition of power to Hussain Muhammad Ershad. A variety of actors participated in political violence, targeting a wide range of citizens through multiple instruments that are legal and physical.

## **Actors and Nature**

The political situation in this period was volatile during the first few months between late 1975 and 1976. As such, a range of actors emerged within this volatile political transition. After the assassination of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, various factions of the military led by high ranked military officers vied for power through violence. Although the change of one-party government through the assassination of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was welcomed by the radical left political parties (Maniruzzaman, 1975), lifting the ban on political parties in 1976 allowed the right-wing political parties to begin their political activities. Besides, the left ideology-based political parties continued to strive for state power. Alongside this, a faction of the military also subscribed to left ideology (Maniruzzaman, 1976). Therefore, various groups of the military engaged in coups and countercoups to occupy the state power. In 1975, Major General Ziaur Rahman (later he became the President Ziaur Rahman), declared himself as the temporary Chief Martial Law Administrator as the country was put under martial law on 15 August 1975 (Ahmed, 2016). However, on 7 November 1975, Ziaur Rahman became the Deputy Chief Martial Law Administrator. In 1976, Ziaur Rahman became the President of Bangladesh. In 1977, he became the Chief Martial Law Administrator. In 1978, he formed his political party the BNP (Ahmed, 2016). Later in 1979, Ziaur Rahman called for the second national parliamentary election. It was also extensively rigged. The BNP secured 69.6 percent of the seats in the parliament (Riaz, 2016). In 1981, Ziaur Rahman was killed in an abortive coup. After a brief transitional period, another military dictator, General Hussain Muhammad Ershad, ascended to the power in 1982. Following the footsteps of Ziaur Rahman, Hussain Muhammad Ershad, also became the Chief Martial Law Administrator, later became

President, formed his political party named the Jatiya Party (JP), called for the national parliamentary elections in 1986, and in 1988 that were extensively manipulated. The Jatiya Party remained in power until 1990. In December 1990, Hussain Muhammad Ershad unwillingly handed over power, giving in to the public demands for his resignation in the midst of widespread public protests against his rule. The power was handed over to a caretaker government, which was entrusted with the responsibility to organize a free, fair, and inclusive national parliamentary election and hand over power to a democratically elected government. This new political background ensued the second phase of this study that is discussed in the next chapter. This chapter discusses the second period of the first phase that begins on 16 August 1975, after the assassination of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and ends on 6 December 1990 through the resignation of Hussain Muhammad Ershad.

In this above mentioned tumultuous political backdrop, the second period of the first phase also saw a variety of actors in perpetrating and supporting violence against citizens. There were both government agents and government affiliates. The government agents can be classified into three categories. These are:

1. Military
2. A leftist political faction of the military
3. State law enforcement agencies

State law enforcement agencies and the government affiliates were different from the previous period as both the ruling political parties were newly formed and were in the initial party development stage. Therefore, this period experienced outsourcing of government affiliates to perpetrate violence against citizens. The state supported any



violence against the political opposition and the dissenting voices that could help the regimes to sustain.

### **Government Agents**

Since 15 August 1975, the military engagement increased in the politics of Bangladesh. As they had legitimate access to weapons, it was easier for them to resort to violence anytime. Besides, their increasing interest in politics also provoked them to take the chance of political instability and resort to violence. It should be noted that the military did not perpetrate violence as a single unit. Rather, different factions of the military resorted to political violence at different times, against different targets, at times against each other. Their involvement in politics led to several coups and countercoups. Beginning the first coup on 15 August 1975, several coups and countercoups took place during the next few years. A countercoup against the killers of the president Sheikh Mujibur Rahman took place on 3 November 1975 (Kaiser, 1995). Another coup by a faction of the military took place on 7 November 1975. From 1975 to 1981, different factions of the military staged dozens of abortive coups. The coups were led by military soldiers and officers of different ranks, including the captain, lieutenant colonel, colonel, and major.

Interestingly, there were no coups or countercoups after Hussain Muhammad Ershad ascended to the state power. It is argued that he successfully satisfied the demands of the military and kept them away from meddling with state power, defying the head of the state (Ahmed, 2016). It was not only the factions of the Bangladesh Army that perpetrated violence, but a clandestine leftist political network was also developed within the Bangladesh Army named the 'Biplobi Sainik Sangstha' (BSS, Revolutionary Soldiers

Union)' (Riaz, 2016). Although it was an organization of non-commissioned soldiers in the Bangladesh Army, it was led by Colonel Taher and supported by the JSD with a view to revolting against the army officers (Riaz, 2016). Influenced by the political ideology of the JSD, the BSS was formed in 1974, consisting of soldiers from Bangladesh Army and Bangladesh Airforce. Kaiser (1995) argues that the BSS aimed at taking over government through armed revolution. With this goal, they created a network of 'rebels' across the country, dividing it into 17 sectors. Riaz (2016, p. 261) argues that BSS distributed leaflet on 5 November 1975 'contained a 12-point demand of the sepoys which included a call for changing the structure as well as functions of the army; abolition of colonial practices such as the Batman system; recognition of the Revolutionary Sainik Sangstha as the central policy-making body of the army and entrusting the supreme authority to this organization; immediate release of all political prisoners; confiscation of the properties of all corrupt officials and individuals; ending discrimination between officers and sepoys in the armed forces, and increasing the salaries of sepoys.' On 7 November 1975, the soldiers took on the street and killed hundreds of military officers and people.

Besides the military, several other state agencies were actors of political violence in Bangladesh. Among those, the police were a regular actor in political violence. Police perpetrated selective violence, particularly against the left ideology-based political leaders and activists of the JSD, the BAL, and the CPB. After Hussain Muhammad Ershad took over the state power, he also followed his predecessors. His administration also targeted political opposition, including the BNP (Ahmed, 2016). Police, armed police, and jail keepers frequently perpetrated violence against the citizens, prisoners, political leaders,

and political activists. (Kaiser, 1995). Directorate General of Forces Intelligence (DGFI) was also a vital actor of violence during the Ershad regime.

### **Government Affiliates**

While there were no direct affiliates of the state in perpetrating political violence, it does not mean that the government agents were the only actors of violence. Between 1975 and 1977, President Ziaur Rahman did not have any political party. Kaiser (1995) argues that Ziaur Rahman abused the administrative power to suppress the dissenting voices against him. Similarly, President Ershad abused the state apparatus to knock down any resistance and opposition. He fully depended on law enforcement agencies to bog down any resistance through political violence (Kaiser, 1995). Alongside, different from the previous approach of the state to create its own affiliates, the government also indirectly supported political violence that was aimed at the political opposition once Ziaur Rahman established his political party. In 1978, President Ziaur Rahman established his political party, named the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP).

The ban on political parties was also lifted, and all the political parties were allowed to be active. Political polarization began based on the right and left ideology. After the second parliamentary election in 1979, the BNP formed the government. After four years, a political party was in power. As the BNP was leaned towards the right ideology, the left-leaning political parties were subjected to persecution and violence. The political steps were almost similar in the case of President Ershad. He formed his political party 'Jatiya Party' (JP) in 1984, won the election in 1986 and formed the government. Kaiser (1995) alleged that the government had an affiliation with various terror groups who would kill

and torture the political opposition of the incumbent government, the BNP and the JP. The selective nature of violence was driven by both political and personal reasons. The law enforcement agencies had overlooked the terrorist activities as those were suppressing the dissenting voices and political rivals. On the other hand, the state had also overlooked the violence between and among the opposition parties as it was beneficial to the government, because inter and intra party clashes was eliminating the ruling party's political rivals. Therefore, on the one hand, the state supported violence perpetrated by the terror groups; on the other hand, the state also overlooked the inter political party rivalry as these were benefitting to the ruling party.

### **Instruments and Scopes**

The instruments used in the violence can be categorized into two types. The first is physical that includes physical harm to the targets. The physical instruments were coup d'état, custodial death, targeted killing, assault, indiscriminate shooting, torture, threat, arrest, imprisonment, enforced disappearance, assassination, and jail killing. The legal instruments were a set of legal steps that helped the state and affiliates to perpetrate violence on the citizens. It includes Special Martial Law Tribunals, Special Powers Act 1974, Emergency Power Rules 1975.

The scope of violence perpetrated or supported by the state was multi-faceted yet were very selective. In both regimes, during the early period, the state targeted entities that could pose a threat to the survival of the regime. However, a difference in the scopes can still be noticed in these two regimes. During the Ziaur Rahman's regime, the political oppositions were fragmented and weakened as well as there was a substantial military

engagement in politics. As we will see below, the coups and countercoups were frequent phenomenon during his regime. Before Ziaur Rahman founded his own political party, the scopes of violence were largely against the military officers and soldiers. One of the reasons for targeting the military is also the ideological influence of the BSS in the military. Ziaur Rahman relied on violence to counter the left ideological proliferation and to prevent the alternative ideological proliferation in the military (Ahmed, 2016).

On the other hand, during the Ershad regime, there were many political parties active in political arena as the ban on politics, including right-wing political parties, was already lifted by Ziaur Rahman. Political parties resumed their activities and new political parties began to be formed. political activities also included organizing regular demonstrations and protests against the military government. In this different political environment and decreased military involvement in politics, the state perpetrated violence against the political activists and leaders during the early days of this regime. However, during both the regimes, once Ziaur Rahman and Hussain Muhammad Ershad had established their own political parties, the scopes of violence were extended to the political opposition, including political leaders, activists, and press as those entities were the dissenting voices against the state. Press freedom, freedom of speech, and freedom of association were sometimes systematically and sometimes explicitly curbed during these two regimes (Rezwan-ul-Alam, 2008). The following discussion explains the instruments that were used to target the citizens in perpetrating violence.

There were several coups and countercoups between 1975 and 1981. Most of the coups failed, only a few succeeded. It is difficult to know how many coups were planned as

many of those failed. Kaiser (1995) argues there were more than 20 abortive coups that were planned against Ziaur Rahman. According to the database developed by Powell & Thyne (2011) that registers coups around the world, between 1975 and 1982, there were at least eight coups and counter-coups. Haque (1980) suggests that at least 26 abortive coups took place against Ziaur Rahman. This large yet uncertain number of coups resulted in significant number of deaths in these years. After 15 August 1975, a counter-coup took place on 3 November 1975 that removed the group of young military officers who were controlling power since the death of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman (Obaidullah, 1991). Among the successive coups, the coup on 7 November was an unprecedented event that was not experienced since 1857 (Riaz, 2016). He writes, “at least 33 other officers, some of their families, and nearly 100 enlisted men including Khaled Musharraf and Lieutenant- Colonel A. T. M. Haider, both valiant freedom fighters, were killed” (Riaz, 2016, p. 66). The aftermath of this coup followed for the next few days, where indiscriminate killings took place in some cantonments across the country. For example, 15 officers were killed in Rangpur Cantonment, 47 personnel were killed in the Chittagong Naval Base in the following week.

Interestingly, violence was also privatized amid this chaos and disorder. Kaiser (1995) argues that while some of the officials were killed as they were anti-revolutionary, few were killed due to personal animosity. The killing of a female doctor at the Combined Military Hospital (CMH) is a case in point. Kaiser (1995) informs that on 5 November, a pregnant wife of a soldier visited a female doctor at CMH, where the female doctor scolded the pregnant woman. The woman informed her soldier husband. On 7 November, during the coup, the soldier collected a rifle and shot the female doctor to death. After the coup on

7 November 1975, the political situation changed, and BSS tried to stage many more coups to take over the political power (Ahmed, 2014). Rashiduzzaman (1978, p. 131) argues, 'leftist elements have sought to radicalize the soldiers, but personal vendettas are also at work.' So, the tumultuous political development and personal grievances resulted in the abortive coups. Abortive coups took place in various places, including Bogra, and Dhaka between 1976 and 1981. The coup on 2 October 1977 killed 11 senior air force officers, 10 army officers, and approximately 200 soldiers. Known death tolls in these abortive coups between 1975 and 1982 are large in number. According to the Center for Systemic Peace (2019), a total of 530 personnel was killed in three coups in this period. 200 deaths were reported on 7 November 1975; 230 deaths were reported on 2 October 1977, and 100 deaths were reported on 30 May 1981. The death of President Ziaur Rahman was a result of an abortive coup. Although President Ershad was also a military officer, his regime did not experience any coup as he succeeded in satisfying the military through providing them resources and perks (Kaiser, 1995).

The coups and countercoups also resulted a large number of targeted killing both in police custody and through legal measures. As the country entered into Martial Law on 15 November 1975, a heavy-handed approach by the government, military, and law enforcement agencies was experienced. Special Martial Law Tribunal is a case in point. The martial law tribunals were created under the 1975 and 1982 Proclamations<sup>3</sup>. The Amnesty International conveyed its concerns about the tribunals that these 'Martial Law Courts have a very wide jurisdiction: they can try offences under martial law but also offences

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<sup>3</sup> Proclamation of 1975, clause (b); Proclamation of 1982, clause (c)

“punishable under any other law” (Obaidullah, 1991, p. 22). The tribunals sentenced political prisoners to the imprisonment of different terms, delivered death sentences to the political prisoners or prisoners of conscience, imprisoned the people without any charge. Martial Law Tribunals were set up with no provision to appeal to any legal authority and to prosecute any ‘anti-state’ elements or actions within the soonest possible time. The prosecutions took place in the camera. Therefore, it is not certainly clear that how many people were sentenced to death through martial law tribunals. Different figures can be gathered from different sources. Riaz (2016) gives an estimated account of the executions from different sources. He suggests, ‘within 25 days of the incident, 92 persons had been sentenced to death.’ The Times of London reported on 5 March 1978, based on conversations with senior army officers, that more than 800 servicemen had been convicted by military tribunals. Mascarenhas reckoned that 1143 men were hanged in the two months following October 1977’ (Riaz, 2016, p. 71). Makeig (1989) reports that at least 1100 military personnel were executed after an abortive coup in 1977. The coup also killed four prominent national political leaders of BAL on 4 November 1975. Kaiser (1995) suggests that a few hundred political activists were killed in the jails in Dhaka, Rajshahi, and other areas in 1980. Amnesty International also reported about the jail killings of the opposition political leaders (Obaidullah, 1991). Rano (1987) reported the killing of 77 JSD activists in between 1975 and 1981. The newspaper report suggests<sup>4</sup> that more than 1500 political activists of JSD were killed between 1975 and 1981. Kaiser (1995) argues that the targeted killings of the JSD leaders and activists were perpetrated by various state agencies. The leader of JSD and the ideologue of BSS, Lieutenant Colonel Taher, was also sentenced to

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<sup>4</sup> The Daily Ittefaq, 02 January 1982



death by a military tribunal along with his elder brother and one other colleague, Major Jalil. The targeted killing in jail and outside also included political leaders and activists of BAL, Bangladesh Shamyobadi Daal (BSD), leaders of student political parties, and trade unions (Kaiser, 1995). In 1982, six executions were reported through the martial court.<sup>5</sup>

The killing took place in various jails and areas of Bangladesh that targeted to suppress the political opposition and the dissenters. Besides, although there was no coup during the period when president Ershad was rule, the targeted killing did not stop in this period. At least 250 people, involved in pro-democracy movement, were killed in various places at different times. The targeted killing was not limited to the political parties or political opposition only, members of civil society organizations, student political organizations, trade unions, civilians were also killed. In 1983, at least 7 students were killed at various anti-government demonstrations. In 1984, police shot the students, labors of trade unions, rickshaw pullers, hawkers, etc. to death. Besides shooting, police smashed and killed people through running police trucks over the people participating in processions and strikes. In 1988, police killed 22 people in a political meeting in Chittagong (Kaiser, 1995). In a different instance, the military engaged in armed battle with the ethnic minorities at the Chittagong Hill Tracts. It killed thousands of minorities as they were opposing the settlement of the Bengali population from the plainland to the hills. Besides killings, abductions, rape, arson, and torture were also reported at the Chittagong Hill Tracts by the Bangladesh Army.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Amnesty International Report, 1983

<sup>6</sup> Amnesty International Report, 1982-1990

The arrest, imprisonment, torture was scaled up to an unprecedented level in this period. The legal instruments such as Special Powers Act, The Emergency Power Regulations provided the law enforcement agencies a wide array of opportunities to arrest, torture, and imprison anyone who were allegedly engaged in or potentially may be involved with 'anti-state' activities. The reports of Amnesty International between 1975 and 1981 emphasized the arrest, imprisonment, and torture of people. '.....New arrests have taken place under the Special Powers Act and the Emergency Power Regulations. Hundreds of members of the Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal, including their recently released leaders, were arrested throughout Bangladesh' (Obaidullah, 1991, p. 21). Amnesty International reported that on 27 November 1975, 800 students were arrested at Dhaka University for political reasons, and a total of 62,000 prisoners were detained in 1975-1976 (Obaidullah, 1991). In 1977, there were approximately 15,000 political prisoners in jail. According to another account, there were 36,685 prisoners held in jail in 1977.<sup>7</sup> Amnesty International reported that the 'majority of political prisoners in Bangladesh belong to the Jatiyo Samajtantrik Dal and associated organization, but hundreds of members of the former Awami League, and the BAKSAL' (Obaidullah, 1991, p. 24). The government also acknowledged that 'persons having different political persuasions are detained under EPR/75 with a view to preventing them from indulging in prejudicial activities' (Obaidullah, 1991, p. 27). With the stated intention of *preventing people from committing anti-state activities*, the arrest and imprisonment in large numbers continued during this period. In 1982, three students were arrested and sentenced to seven years of imprisonment 'with hard labor for posting "anti-state and anti-government" posters' on the

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<sup>7</sup> Amnesty International Report, 1977

wall of the Dhaka university campus. As of January 1983, there were at least 400 political detainees in the prison.<sup>8</sup> In February 1984, the government announced that 1331 people were arrested from the demonstrations.<sup>9</sup> According to a report of Amnesty International (1993), the total number of detained in Ziaur Rahman's regime was over 100,000 and in Hussain Muhammad Ershad's regime was 150,000 under the Special Power Act.

Besides arrest and imprisonment, torture in police custody was also reported in this period (Kaiser, 1995). Kaiser (1995) suggests that the Directorate General of Forces Intelligence (DGFI) frequently abducted people, arrested the political leaders and activists, and tortured them in the cantonments. Torture included electrocution, injecting foreign objects through the rectum, excessive beating, blinding during interrogation, etc. (Kaiser, 1995). The DGFI was established in 1972 as a military intelligence agency. Although its scope of activities was related to the issues of national security and sovereignty, the incumbent government has used this entity to perpetrate violence against the citizens.

As the incumbent ruling party perpetrated violence on the political rivals and opposition through the government agents, the government agents also overlooked the political assassinations perpetrated by the terrorists and miscreants. The law and order situation went beyond control. Despite the fact, the political assassination of the political rivals benefitted the ruling party as the state law enforcement agencies was indifferent to these crimes. The assassination killed political leaders and activists of BAL, BNP, BSD, JSD, etc. For example, the first half of 1980 claimed 90 lives through political assassination,

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<sup>8</sup> Amnesty International Report, 1984

<sup>9</sup> Amnesty International Report, 1984

whereas the first half of 1981 claimed 185 lives through political assassination (Kaiser, 1995).

Another instrument of violence perpetrated by the state was curbing press freedom. Although both the regimes apparently showed that those were in favor of freedom of the press, however, in practice, they were not. The print and electronic media were strictly monitored by the government, and the contents and news about the image of the government were subject to approval or '*consent*' by the government (Rezwan-ul-Alam, 2008). Although, initially Ziaur Rahman's regime showed flexibility towards press freedom as he lifted bans on the newspapers; the flexibility sustained for a very short period as the police arrested the chairman of the editorial board of the Daily Ittefaq in 1976, shortly after repealing the Newspaper (Annulment of Declaration) Act, 1975 (Rezwan-ul-Alam, 2008) . Another editor of a local English weekly newspaper was formally charged with 'conspiracy to overthrow the government' (Rezwan-ul-Alam, 2008, p. 190). The journalists were suppressed in 1978 when 22 of them were injured in an attack by the police in a peaceful procession of the journalists. Besides, 'at least three publications were banned during Zia's rule for publishing articles objectionable to the authorities' (Rezwan-ul-Alam, 2008, p. 190).

The Ershad regime was not any different in curbing press freedom. Right after suspending the constitution and declaring martial law across the country, the military government imposed censorship on the press and banned any criticism of the martial law regime. The regulation also had a provision of up to seven years of imprisonment if any criticism is published on the media (Rezwan-ul-Alam, 2008). Such punishment was also

meted out in various cases. For example, the editor of the Daily Runner, a newspaper published from Jessore, was sentenced to three years of imprisonment in 1982 for criticizing the martial law. The banning of newspapers was also a regular action taken by the government. The weekly Jai Jai Din, Ekota, Amader Katha, etc. are among the newspapers that were banned due to publishing '*objectionable articles*.'

After the imposition of the state of emergency in 1987, media, including the international media, were heavily censored (Islam, 1988). A journalist from the British Broadcasting Corporations (BBC) was arrested (Islam, 1988), and another journalist was deported (Rezwan-ul-Alam, 2008). The last year of this period, 1990, brought an extreme violence perpetrated by the state against the journalists. Rezwan-ul-Alam (2008, p. 196) informs, 'two journalists were killed, 12 arrested, eight publications banned, and 24 incidents of attack on media organisations were recorded in 1990.' The state perpetrated violence against the journalists in various forms and curbed press freedom, including freedom of speech and association.

Overall, the period between 16 August 1975 and 6 November 1990 can be characterized as a period of severe political violence perpetrated by the state. The targets were mostly politicians who opposed the martial law and the government. Besides, the unprecedented involvement of the military in politics also led a high degree of violence among them by various factions.

In a nutshell, the first phase is characterized by the presence of diverse kinds of political violence. The government agents from various law enforcement agencies perpetrated violence against citizens, including political leaders, activists, military officers,

soldiers, students, ordinary citizens. Violence helped the government to stay in power. The government affiliates also perpetrated violence alongside law enforcement agencies against political rivals in various forms. The government affiliates were more organized in the first period, whereas the government affiliates were less organized and sometimes worked as an outsource during the second period. Both the physical and legal instruments were used against the citizens and the targets of violence. While the physical instruments were heavily used to perpetrate violence, the legal instruments played a key role in an attempt to legalize the use of violence irrespective of their targets. The legal instruments were coercive by nature, aiming at suppressing the political opposition and silencing the dissenting voice. Perpetration of violence by the state has played the central role for the incumbent to remain in power in the first phase.

## **CHAPTER V: HOPE AND DESPAIR**

### **Second Phase (1991-2011)**

After the end of the military regime in 1990, democratic government came back through the fifth parliamentary election under a caretaker government. It was widely anticipated that the civilian government elected through parliamentary election would keep a leash on state instruments perpetrating violence against its citizens. However, the reality did not meet the expectations. Unlike the previous phase, this phase is characterized by regular national parliamentary elections under the caretaker government. There have been five national parliamentary elections in this phase, where four of those were inclusive and relatively fair (Riaz, 2016). Both the major political parties, the BAL, and the BNP, were elected alternatively for two times through these four inclusive national parliamentary elections. These four inclusive elections were held in February 1991, June 1996, October 2001, and December 2008. These resulted victories of the BNP twice – 1991 and 2001, and the BAL twice – 2001 and 2008. A non-inclusive election, held in February 1996, returned BNP to power; but the parliament was dissolved on 26 March 1996.

The inclusion of the caretaker government system during the poll time implies that the lack of trust among the political parties is so prevalent that no political party can be trusted to organize the election under political party's supervision. The lack of trust between these major two political parties often translated into violence and street agitation against each other. Therefore, whichever political party was in power, it continued to use the state law enforcement agencies to suppress the political opposition and establish its dominance. The continued squabble between the two major political parties BAL and BNP,

led to the continuation of political violence. The country experienced a total of five parliamentary regimes and a military interregnum for two years in this phase. Irrespective of which government it was, violence was a regular tool to deal with opposition and the dissenters.

### **Actors and Nature**

The new bi-partisan political culture in Bangladesh changed the dimension of actors in perpetrating violence against the citizens. Previously, the military regimes used the government agents to perpetrate violence against the political opposition and citizens. The government affiliates were less active during the military regimes as their political parties were in the developing stage and were yet to create direct affiliates. As discussed in the previous chapter, these regimes mostly supported violence by any entity, which would benefit them to stay in power. With the emergence of bi-partisan politics of the BAL and the BNP, the culture of violence perpetrated by the political wings of the ruling party resurfaced vigorously. Besides, the government agents also perpetrated violence against the citizens, mostly the political opposition. Therefore, the actors of violence in this phase included both the government agents and the government affiliates.

### **Government Agents**

Political violence between 1991 and 2011 was less extreme compared to the previous phase. However, political violence did not stop. The state remained reliant on coercion through its actors. The targets of violence were the political opposition, the press, and the dissenters. Besides, various wings of the incumbent ruling party collaborated with



the government agents. The government agents included state agencies such as police, DGFI, and military. They continued to perpetrate violence in this period.

The return of the military in perpetrating violence was an unprecedented move by any democratically elected government in this phase. In 2002, the newly elected BNP government decided to call on the army to launch a nationwide law and order restoration operation (Jahan, 2003). The continued violence across the country and the deterioration of law and order were considered as the key reasons for the government to deploy the army under a civilian government. Interestingly, the use of the military in perpetrating violence was not condemned by the political opposition BAL; rather, they welcomed the decision on the condition that their leaders and activists should not be subject to persecution by the Army (Jahan, 2003). However, BAL did not comment about persecution of other political parties. The country-wide military action was named 'Operation Clean Heart.' Khalil (2016, p. 19) writes,

'Operation Clean Heart, a country-wide security crackdown which deployed more than 40,000 military personnel in response to a 'deterioration in law and order.' During the crackdown, the military set up hundreds of makeshift detention/torture centres (in public places like schools and stadiums) across the country. These centres were used for holding more than 10,000 detainees (political activists, common criminals, and members of outlawed communist parties) arrested without charge or warrant.'

Pathania (2003) informs that more than 50 detainees were tortured to death. On the other hand, the creation of Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) was also a new addition to the actors of violence as this body was created particularly to use violent means. RAB was

created through the act 'Armed Police Battalion (Amendment) Act 2003,' which was a revised version of the 'Armed Police Battalion Ordinance 1979' (Khalil, 2016).

Interestingly, the earlier ordinance was also promulgated during the military regime ruled by Ziaur Rahman, the founder of BNP. After 23 years, BNP revitalized the ordinance and created a separate specialist in violence. The creation of a new actor suggests that the state continued to rely on violence.

As a result, the state has always adopted a coercive approach in dealing with its citizens. The politicization of the state agencies was felt to a great extent as the successive governments continued to use the state agencies to suppress its political rivals, opposition political parties, and the dissenters. The use of police and paramilitary agencies (Amnesty International, 1993), deploying military personnel in 2002, creating specialists on violence in 2004 (Khalil, 2016), suggest that the state chose to be coercive on a regular basis. The actors of political violence by the state included RAB, police, army, joint armed force, Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB), Coast Guard, Navy, and jail authorities (Odhikar, 2020a).

### **Government Affiliates**

Besides the state agencies, the political wings of the ruling party also perpetrated violence on its rivals that were implicitly supported by the state. This collaborative nature of violence not only benefitted the ruling political party but also legitimized their authority in practice due to the implicit support of the state. Amnesty International (2005b, p. 17) acknowledged that 'successive governments have routinely ignored human rights abuses by their own supporters or supporters of parties in alliance with them, allowing them impunity for such acts. At the same time, a poorly trained and apparently corrupt police

force and a severely overloaded judicial system deprive victims of human rights violations, or those defending them, of access to justice.'

The collaboration was not limited to the political wings only; rather, the involvement of the elected representatives of the parliament in political violence was also experienced. While a great deal of violence was politically motivated, the privatization of violence using state apparatus was also noticed in many instances. The attack on journalist Nazmul Imam of the Daily Manab Zamin is a case in point. The journalist published an article in the newspaper detailing 'allegations of murder, robbery, collection of protection money, kidnapping for ransom, and the link between these crimes and another ruling alliance MP who had a senior government post in Kushtia. On that same day, the government ordered the police to arrest him' (Amnesty International, 2005a, p. 1). He escaped the arrest but could not escape attacks and stabbing by the miscreants. He was repeatedly attacked and later was stabbed by some masked men on 27 May 2002. Although, it was the unidentified masked miscreants who attacked him, the actors can be recognized from the nature of violence and the series of pre-violence and post-violence incidents. The police initially refused to accept his complaint. However, after the complaint was filed, 'at least three investigation officers have been replaced suggest possible interference by influential people to slow down the course of justice. Each time an investigation officer is replaced, the entire investigation, reportedly, starts anew (Amnesty International, 2005a, p. 2).' Therefore, we see that a combined effort of coercion and collaboration also took place between the government agents and the government affiliates in this period that shaped the collaborative nature of political violence.

## **Instruments and Scopes**

The state broadly used two types of instruments to carry out violence against the citizens. These were physical and legal. The physical instruments were imprisonment, torture, custodial death, rape, extrajudicial killing, and enforced disappearance. The physical instruments were mostly used at the discretion of the law enforcement agencies, while the legal instruments facilitated the use of physical instruments with impunity and monopoly. Legal instruments such as 'Joint Drive Indemnity Ordinance 2003', 'Armed Police Battalion (Amendment) Act 2003, filing cases against the political opposition under Penal Codes were the key instruments in this phase. The targets of violence were political leaders, activists, journalists, press, and ordinary citizens. The following discussion briefly presents the instruments and scopes of violence perpetrated or supported by the state in this phase.

Imprisonment, torture, and death in police custody continued to take place in this phase (Amnesty International, 1993). A large number of political prisoners were detained during this period. According to an Amnesty International report (1993), between 1 July 1991 and 15 June 1992, a total of 5120 people was detained under the governments' executive authority. In some cases, despite the High Court's order to release the detainees, the detention continued for months. The imprisonment mainly targeted the activists of opposition parties. For example, Serajul Alam Khan was detained for months on the ground of forming Mujib Bahini and expressing his political views (Amnesty International, 1993). Human rights activists were also incarcerated. The imprisonment of four human rights defenders Shahriar Kabir, Professor Muntassir Mamoon, Saleem Samad, and Pricilla Raj, is an example. They were arrested in 2002 'on allegation that they had divulged

information about the human rights situation in the country to foreign journalists were all reportedly at the instigation of the authorities' (Amnesty International, 2005b, p. 12).

The violent engagement of police with civilians, political activists, journalists resulted in torture in many instances. Sadly, most of the allegations against the police went untried and unpunished (Amnesty International, 2000). Amnesty International reports that 'in one such representation in April 1991, the organization raised its concern with the BNP government about at least seven deaths in Dhaka Central Jail as a result of prisoners being beaten and burned with hot water by security forces.' However, no one was tried for these killings inside the jail. It appeared that torture in police custody became a routine occurrence in this phase. The modes of torture included punching on the face, tying up with ropes, beating with sticks, ill-treatment, rooting out nails from fingers with steel objects, etc. The targets of torture included students, journalists, civilians, children, political leaders, and activists of opposition political parties. Several incidents of beating journalists and firing on them during news gathering and taking photographs of various demonstrations across the country were reported in press. According to the report of Amnesty International (2000, p. 4), '[a]t least two journalists were beaten by riot police when they took photographs during a demonstration in July 1992. About 50 other journalists were injured, some seriously, when police broke into the National Press Club in Dhaka and opened fire. At least 12 people were reported to have died as a result of torture in 1992.' At least 40 people reportedly died in police and judicial custody in 1994 due to being subject to torture in police custody. Between 2001 and 2011, a total of 855 cases were reported as custodial death (Odhikar, 2020b).

Privatization of violence was committed by the law enforcement agencies in various capacities in this phase. Sexual harassment and rape in police custody are the cases in point. In 1991, a 21-year-old college student was assaulted by five police trainees with an intention to rape her. Upon failure to do so, the police trainees cut her throat and left her to die (Amnesty International, 1993). In 1995, a 15-year-old girl died after three police officers raped and injured her. Incidents of rape by police in the police custody and outside of the police station continued even in 1997, 1999 (Amnesty International, 2000).

It was not only the government agents who perpetrated political violence. The ruling political party and its various wings collaborated with the state agencies in perpetrating political violence. For example, In July 1998, a student was beaten to death in police custody, where 13 police officers and a local BAL leader was charged in connection to this death (Amnesty International, 2000). The collaboration of the ruling political party leaders and their various wings became a regular phenomenon in this period. These incidents took place under the BAL government. However, it was no different under the BNP regime. In 1996, a former student and political activist affiliated to the Bangladesh Chatra League (BCL), was beaten during a demonstration on 21 March 1996. The victim reported to Amnesty International (2000, p. 6) that ‘The police did not take any action against the JCD (Jaitiyatbadi Chatra Dal, the student wing of the BNP) people, but about 40 policemen came for us BCL activists. They began beating us. About 12 of us, including myself were beaten severely. The others had managed to run away. The police then caught the 12 of us. One man named Qamrul Islam, who was standing next to me was hit by a bullet, after a police shooting and was taken to hospital.’

Similarly, during the BAL regime between 1996 and 2001, the journalists, political leaders, students, civilians were repressed by the state and its collaborator from the ruling party. The president and secretary of Jatiyatabadi Chatra Dal (JCD) were arrested from demonstration and were seriously tortured in police custody that they both lost consciousness after each round of torture. According to the Bangladesh Rehabilitation Centre for Trauma victims (BRCT), at least 18 people were killed in police custody in 1999, while another Bangladeshi human rights organization, Odhikar, records 49 cases of deaths in police or army custody or prisons from January to September 2000. In most cases, the prisoners reportedly died as a result of torture while in custody (Amnesty International, 2000). In 2001, a journalist named Tipu Sultan was attacked at his home by the local ruling party political activists due to publishing reports criticizing a local politician. He was threatened previously and then attacked. Amnesty International reported that for about seven months, the police did not register a case regarding this attack; they were prevented by the local politician (Amnesty International, 2005a).

The presence of the military in political violence became noticeable after 1990. During the 'Operation Clean Heart', ostensibly an anti-crime operation between October 16, 2002 and January 9, 2003, the military arrested approximately 10,000 political activists, criminals, and outlawed communist party activists without any charge or warrant (Khalil, 2016). Extraordinary impunity was granted to the perpetrators of violence in this military operation. Khalil (2016, pp. 19-20) writes,

'The parliament enacted the Joint Drive Indemnity Ordinance of 2003 that granted the security force and government officials blanket immunity from prosecution or censure

for 'any casualty, damage to life and property. Violation of rights, physical or mental damage' during Operation Clean Heart. This was a black law that neither suspended fundamental rights nor granted extraordinary powers to the security forces. Instead, the law retroactively created a state of exception by granting the security forces absolute legal immunity.'

The systematic impunity through legal instruments has provided the state an advantage to persecute the political opposition and perpetrate violence against its citizens. A large number of arrests of the political activists and leaders testifies to the fact that the state has used the legal instruments to facilitate the use of physical instruments of violence against its citizens.

The culture of torture proliferated when a new special institution of violence was created in 2004, namely the 'Rapid Action Battalion (RAB). Khalil (2016, p. 18) writes that 'RAB is the most efficient device of state terror that the national security machinery of Bangladesh has ever developed.' Extrajudicial killing by the RAB and other state agencies became a new normal in the politics of Bangladesh. Similar to the military, the RAB also enjoyed the systematic legal advantage of perpetrating violence without being subjected to any punitive measures. The Armed Police Battalion (Amendment) Act 2003 provides the RAB the indemnity by ensuring that 'no suit, prosecution or other legal proceedings shall be against any member of (RAB) for anything which is done in good faith under this ordinance' (Khalil, 2016, p. 20).' The indemnity from prosecution resulted in more violence and severe human rights violations by the RAB. According to Odhikar (2005),



‘The year 2004 witnessed an alarming escalation in human rights violations. From 01 January to 31 December, 526 people were killed, 6235 injured 2918 arrested, and 28 abducted in incidents concerning political violence. 240 people were killed in the hands of law enforcers. Of them, 149 were killed in ‘crossfire’, (a euphemism used for extrajudicial killings) [In the previous year,] the figure was 81. 79 people were killed by Rapid Action Battalion (RAB), 128 by police, 9 by two elite forces – Cheetah and Cobra, and 24 by other enforcing agencies. 90 people died in police custody allegedly due to torture. Among them, 80 persons died in jail, and 10 died in police custody.’

In 2005, 396 were killed by the law enforcement agencies (Odhikar, 2006), in 2006, the number was 355 (Odhikar, 2007), in 2007, the total number of extrajudicial killing was 184. In 2008, the number fell to 184, in 2009, it was 154, in 2010, 127 people were killed by the law enforcement agencies (Odhikar, 2011), and in 2011, 84 people were killed by the state (Odhikar, 2012). These numbers show that the state agencies have always been involved in violence. The targets of the extrajudicial killing included political leaders and activists of the opposition political parties, including the BAL, the BNP, the PBCP, various outlawed groups, farmers, businessmen, students, freedom fighters, laborers, journalists, etc.<sup>10</sup> The appreciation of political violence by the government was also recorded. In December 2011, the Home Minister, Advocate Sahara Khatun said that ‘the law enforcement agencies will continue their work, regardless of whatever is being said about extrajudicial killings. The criminals are supposed to be killed when law enforcers shoot at

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<sup>10</sup> Based on a series of human rights reports by Odhikar published in between 2005 and 2012

them in self-defense.’<sup>11</sup> Apart from extrajudicial killing, enforced disappearance also started to increase. The number reached 32 in 2011 from 19 in the previous year and only 3 in 2009 (Odhikar, 2020c).

The state of press freedom in Bangladesh, in this phase, was mixed. Earlier, we have seen the state acted against press freedom and censored contents on various occasions. The banning of print media was a regular phenomenon in the first phase. The second phase did not experience such a degree of harsh treatment. Nevertheless, the journalists were attacked, killed, kidnapped by the incumbent political party activists and leaders. On several occasions, police also attacked journalists (Committee to Protect Journalists, 2006). One of the key developments regarding electronic media in this phase was the privatization. Previously, electronic media were under the complete control of the government. In the first phase, print media which did not follow the government’s directives were subjected to violence by the state. However, in this phase, electronic media were largely privatized and owned by private companies (Monty, 2011). Therefore, the companies and owners who were in a good relationship with the government was not subjected to violence by the state or its affiliates. Consequently, the bi-partisan political environment was also reflected in the press. Monty (2011) argues that media was pathologically divided between two major political camps. Media and journalists of the opposition camp had been subjected to repression and violence by the state and its affiliates. During the brief interregnum and emergency rule between 2007 and 2008, the state intensified curbing press freedom. The Emergency Power Rules 2007 ‘restricted

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<sup>11</sup> The daily Ittefaq, 27 January 2011

coverage of sensitive topics, allowed censorship of print and broadcast outlets, criminalized provocative criticism of the government, and imposed penalties, including up to five years in prison and hefty fines, for violations' (Freedom House, 2009). However, no journalist was killed in this two-year period, a rarity in the history of press freedom of the country.

According to Odhikar (2020), a total of 20 journalists were killed between 2001 and 2011. However, the number does not portray the entire picture. In this period, 1130 journalists were injured, 409 were assaulted, 135 were attacked, 95 were arrested, 12 were abducted, 1172 were threatened, and 636 were sued because of reports. The imprisonment of the editor of the Daily Amar Desh is a case in point. The editor was sentenced to six months in prison for publishing an article that accused the Supreme Court of being biased in favor of the state. Besides, the newspaper was also banned, and its license was canceled. Samad (2010) reports, 'Hours after the cancellation of the opposition daily and filing of fraud cases against the editor, nearly 200 riot police with bullet-proof vest (flak jackets) armed with batons, tear-gas and automatic rifles encircled the newspaper office in a commercial area of the capital and also the printing plant shortly before midnight (01 June). As the newspaper was being printed, the riot police, along with security agents from Special Branch [of the police], stormed the printing plant and stopped the publishing of the daily. The police confiscated the 02 June printed newspapers before it could be distributed to newsstand.'

Overall, the violence perpetrated by the state agencies and its affiliates in various cases intensified over time. The instruments of political violence in this period remained

largely similar compared to the previous phase. However, this phase did not experience military courts or martial laws. The actors of political violence were also diversified to various agencies of state and collaborators from the ruling political party. The scopes of exercising violence also had variation in terms of political affiliation, occupation, and gender. Combinedly, the two phases from 1972 to 2011 experienced both civilian and military governments. The state was always reliant on violence. The incumbent governments routinely used state apparatus to target its political opponents, silence the dissenters, and dealt with any resistance irrespective of violent or non-violent nature.

## **CHAPTER VI: A MORE PREDATORY STATE**

### **Third Phase (2012-2018)**

The third phase of the period covered in this thesis examines the violence perpetrated or supported by the state between 2012 and 2018. This phase is different compared to the other two phases. In the first phase (1972-1990), we saw that the interim BAL government was elected through the first national parliamentary election but later amended the constitution and changed the model of government to a presidential system with a single party politics. Then the country experienced irregularity in national parliamentary elections and the military regime under martial law and military-backed civilian regime. The government perpetrated violence using law enforcement agencies against various targets in order to remain in power. In the second phase (1991-2011), the transition of state power took place democratically through regular national parliamentary elections under a caretaker government system. There were five national parliamentary elections in the second phase among which four were relatively fair. However, despite the peaceful and democratic transition of the government, the culture of political violence sustained through perpetrating violence against political oppositions, press, and the dissenters.

The third phase, discussed here, is distinctly different from the previous two phases. On the one hand, in this phase, the provision of the caretaker government was removed from the constitution, which was a vital mechanism for ensuring a peaceful and democratic transfer of power. The 15<sup>th</sup> amendment abrogating this provision was passed in the parliament on 30 June 2011 following the initial verdict of the Supreme Court declaring the

13<sup>th</sup> amendment 'unconstitutional' which incorporated the caretaker government provision on 10 May 2011. Although this process took place during the second phase, the full verdict by the Supreme Court was published in 2012. This is the reason I consider 2012 as the beginning of the third phase. Unlike the previous two phases, despite having a partisan and incumbent government in power, regular national parliamentary elections have taken place. There have been two national parliamentary elections in this phase, in 2014 and in 2018, and each of them took place in a timely manner. One of the two elections was very one-sided and participated by only a few political parties, and boycotted by most of the political parties including the BNP (Ahmed F. , 2014). The other election was very inclusive and participated by 40 registered political parties (Al Jazeera, 2018). The incumbent government won both the elections with a super majority (Uttom & Rozario, 2019).

With the super majority in the parliament, the incumbent party tightened its grip on the citizens and systematically perpetrated violence against the citizens. We have seen in the previous chapters that the caretaker government provision was incorporated in the constitution due to the lack of trust among the political parties regarding the modus operandi of peaceful and democratic transition of power. With the scrapping of caretaker government provision in 2011. the BAL government brought back crisis of trust among the political parties regarding the mechanism of peaceful and democratic transition of power. In the second phase (1991-2011), violence was used against the political opposition, however, the state power was transferred regularly with public mandate and inclusive elections. However, this phase used the elections and coercion to stay in the state power,

form an absolute majority in the parliament, and continue perpetrating violence against the citizens.

In doing so, the incumbent has created schism using two issues: the spirit of liberation war and development as an alternative to democracy. These were used to draw a line on the sand and thus defined friends and enemies. Consequently, those who were labeled as enemies were considered as legitimate targets of persecution and violence. Violence was meted out with impunity.

The first issue is the spirit of liberation war. This issue has placed the political parties into two broad camps led by the BAL and the BNP. The BAL claims that it subscribes to the spirit of the liberation war, and any party allies with them is also a subscriber to this spirit (Dhaka Tribune, 2019). The term 'spirit of liberation war' gained stronger currency since 2013 when those who allegedly committed crimes against humanity during the independence war in 1971 were being tried in the International Crimes Tribunal (ICT) (BBC News, 2016). A social movement began in Shahbagh Square (Khan, 2019), where the movement leaders used this as a slogan to inspire people (Sajjad & Härdig, 2017). Most of the alleged war criminals were from Bangladesh Jamaat -e- Islami (BJI), which is a political ally of BNP. Their alliance also won the seventh national parliamentary election and formed the government in 2001. Soon the BAL adopted the slogan as their party spirit since the incumbent government was trying the war criminals. On the other hand, the BNP led opposition was framed as a subscriber to the anti-liberation war values or Razakar<sup>12</sup> due to

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<sup>12</sup> Razakar is used to describe the group of people who opposed the liberation war and collaborated with the Pakistani occupation force against the freedom fighters.

their alliance with the BJI (Daily Bangladesh, 2019). In this circumstance, the political opposition was politically demoralized. Therefore, this issue of schism immensely facilitated to identify the political opposition as the enemy of the state and liberation war and thus to perpetrate violence against them.

The other issue is the development as an alternative to democracy (Zaman, 2017). The incumbent government claims that they do not count who would vote for them or not; rather, they want to develop the country (Ekushe Television, 2020). However, the development came at the cost of democracy and rights (BBC Bangla, 2018). The incumbent government also claims that nobody except the BAL has done anything to develop this country (Bangla Tribune, 2018). The issue of development minus democracy (Khalid & Sarker, 2018) has also placed democracy in the latter half (Zakaria, 2018). Hence, it also helped to identify the people as enemies of the incumbent government who consider development and democracy equally as well as who prioritize democracy over development.

This new political context increased the number of actors of political violence, from both government agents and affiliates. Besides law enforcement agencies, government affiliates were also more engaged in violence. Violence was perpetrated selectively against political opposition, citizens of various backgrounds, press, and media. The instruments of violence were also diversified. Various physical and legal instruments, cyber instruments were also introduced to demoralize the dissent, curb freedom of expression, and suppress political opposition. The predominant physical instruments were enforced disappearances, attacks, extrajudicial killings, imprisonments, shootings, tortures. The legal instruments



were Digital Security Act 2018, Information & Communication Technology Act (Amendment) 2013, Narcotics Control Act 2018, and cases against the political opposition under Penal Codes. that were used to perpetrate violence. The cyber instruments are indeed a new addition in this phase of political violence. The cyber instruments included banning social media, limiting internet speed to interrupt communication, surveillance, etc.

### **Actors and Nature**

The state continued to rely on violence in the third phase. The nature of violence was offensive in many instances and retaliatory in some instances. The actors of political violence have also been changed. Unlike the previous two phases, this phase did not experience military's engagement in perpetrating violence. However, the law enforcement agencies, including police and the RAB, were at the forefront of perpetrating violence. They perpetrated violence against the citizens, political opponents of the incumbent government, press, and the dissenters.

The government affiliates also perpetrated violence that was supported by the state. Various political wings of the incumbent government meted out violence against the opposition political activists, journalists, and ordinary citizens. In many instances, pro-government political operatives helped the law enforcement agencies. The instruments of violence of the government affiliates included attack, torture, killing, arson, rape, and threat. This phase has seen more active involvement of the government affiliates in perpetrating violence against the citizens compared to other two phases. The perpetrators of violence have reportedly enjoyed impunity.

## **Government Agents**

Government Agents prioritized violence over tolerance in dealing with dissent. Law enforcement agencies perpetrated extreme violence in demonstrations, marches, and meetings. Police, the RAB, and occasionally the Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) were employed to confront the demonstrations and marches and used indiscriminate violence. There were various incidents of protests in this phase on different political issues. These included opposing the verdicts delivered by the International Crimes Tribunal, demanding blasphemy laws by an Islamist group Hefazat-e-Islami (HI), demanding the restoration of the caretaker government for an inclusive parliamentary election (Ahmad, 2014), removal of quota system from public service, demanding road safety (Human Rights Watch, 2018). The law enforcement agencies resorted to a heavy-handed approach to dismantle these protests. According to the Human Rights Watch report (2013), 'In many cases, security forces responded to violence in an appropriate fashion, using nonlethal methods to disperse crowds. Yet in many other cases, the police, Rapid Action Battalion (RAB), and the Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) responded with excessive force, killing protesters and bystanders. Security forces used rubber bullets and live ammunition improperly or without justification, killing some protesters in chaotic scenes, and executing others in cold blood. Many of the dead were shot in the head and chest, indicating that security forces fired directly into crowds. Others were beaten or hacked to death. At least seven children were killed by security forces.'

The use of brutal force by law enforcement agencies was also extended to the peaceful protest of the civilians, including teachers (Simon, 2018), and students (BBC Bangla, 2018). The road safety movement in Bangladesh is a case in point. This movement

was organized by the students in 2018 after two students were killed in a road accident. The students were protesting and voluntarily maintaining traffic on the street in order to ensure safe driving. Police have reportedly attacked the students in various places and dispersed the demonstrators using tear gas. They also remained silent when the political wings of the ruling party attacked the students across the country (Prothom Alo, 2018). The programs of the political parties were also attacked by the police in many instances. The protests of the BNP and its allies, alliance of left political parties, were regularly attacked in this phase. Two significant instances of attacks by the police took place in 2013 against two Islamist forces. The leaders and activists of the BJI took to the street in 2013, opposing the verdict of the International Crimes Tribunal delivered against the war criminals of 1971. The protests were dealt with severe violence following the 'shoot to kill' order by the government (Prothom Alo, 2013). The activists of the BJI and its youth wing the Bangladesh Islami Chatra Shibir (BICS) also attacked the police in various places during their protest. According to the HRW report, 'Jamaat supporters were responsible for a number of deaths, but the security forces killed many more with often indiscriminate attacks on protesters and bystanders.' The other large attack by the law enforcement agency took place in 2013 was against another Islamist group called the Hefazat-e-Islami (HI). On 5 May 2013, they organized a large sit-in at the downtown of Dhaka. Hundreds of thousands of HI activists gathered in Dhaka from all over the country, demanding the enactment of the blasphemy law. The law enforcement agencies brutally beat them with sticks, indiscriminately fired the activists, and killed many of them (The Telegraph, 2013). At least 50 of the activists were reportedly killed, a dozen of law enforcement agency members were also killed by the protesters (Human Rights Watch, 2013). Despite such a

high degree of violence, law enforcement agencies were not held accountable for their acts. According to the Human Rights Watch report (Human Rights Watch, 2013), 'Bangladeshi security forces frequently used excessive force in responding to street protests, killing at least 150 protesters and injuring at least 2,000 between February and October 2013. While large numbers of protesters were arrested, Bangladeshi authorities made no meaningful efforts to hold members of the security forces accountable. At least 90 protesters were killed by security force gunfire during the clashes among the Shahbagh movement, Jamaat-e-Islami supporters, and security forces in March and April.'

The regular attacks by law enforcement agencies on political and civil movements implies that the state serves the political interest of the incumbent government. The coercive nature of violence testifies to the fact that despite winning three consecutive national parliamentary elections, the incumbent government still prefers violence to deal with the political opposition and silence the dissenters.

### **Government Affiliates**

The government affiliates also continued perpetrating violence in this phase. Besides perpetrating violence, they also provided support to the violence perpetrated by law enforcement agencies. The government affiliates were mainly the various political wings of the BAL. Among them, the predominant force was BAL and its student wings Bangladesh Chatra League (BCL). Besides the BCL, another political wing of BAL, Bangladesh Jubo League (BJL), also perpetrated violence against the political opposition, journalists, and citizens. The educational institutions, primarily dominated by the BCL, were rife with violence. Students were a regular target of violence by the BCL. After the

BAL came to power in 2009, at least 33 students were killed in the educational institutions by the BCL activists (Daily Sangram, 2019). Besides, teachers, journalists were also subjected to violence by the organization throughout the country (Weekly Sonar Bangla, 2013). Noticeable development of this phase was the privatization of violence, that is using the organizational identities and strengths for personal gains. For example, using political power, the BCL activists engaged in violence over securing government tenders, extortion, rape, sexual harassment. In many cases, the perpetrators enjoyed impunity due to being ruling party activists. Odhikar (2018) report suggests that

‘the ruling party affiliated organisations, Chhatra League and Jubo League were involved in violence and attacked leaders and activists of the opposition political parties, women and children and ordinary citizens, members of minority communities and dissenters across the country. They dominated educational institutions and various business institutions and several incidents of extortion, clashes over tender bids, land grabbing, leakage of exam question papers and violence at different places occurred during this period. They were also engaged in many internal conflicts and violence. Most of the criminal activities and violence were linked to vested interest. In many cases they were seen attacking opponents with weapons, which was also publicised in different media. The ruling party leaders-activists enjoy impunity for their crimes due to political influence. The incumbent government also took the initiative to withdraw several criminal cases filed against the ruling party activists, by considering them to be politically motivated cases.’

The state agencies and the pro-government activists collaborated in unleashing violence against political (Dhaka Tribune, 2018) and nonpolitical movement alike. During

the quota reform movement and the road safety movement in 2018, BCL and BJK activists ruthlessly attacked the protestors on several instances (The Daily Star, 2018). According to the Human Rights Watch report (2018), 'university and school students launched a protest demanding road safety following the death of two students by a speeding bus.

Eyewitnesses credibly alleged that members of the Awami League and their student wing had attacked the students with sticks and machetes. Authorities took no action against those carrying out the abuses, but instead detained the protesting students.' It is evident that there was a passive endorsement of exacting violence on the demonstrators by the state. A culture of impunity of the perpetrators also contributed to the continuation of this pattern and suppression of the freedom of assembly. Largely, the student wing of the ruling party, Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL), appeared as the perpetrators of violence on the protesters on many occasions, including verbally abusing the protesters, attacking, and beating them. These incidents of beating have caused physical and psychological trauma to many demonstrators and some reportedly gave up hope for life (The Daily Star, 2018a). This pattern was repeated in the case of the quota reform movement, road safety movement, and other many more. They attacked the students, journalists, teachers, children, and human rights activists. A terrifying side of this suppression is the BCL attackers have largely gone unpunished (CIVICUS, 2018).

The incidents of violence perpetrated and supported by the government agents and the government affiliates imply that the state depended on coercion throughout the third phase. They dealt with both political and nonpolitical movements using force by the law enforcement agencies and the ruling party leaders and activists. The political opposition

faced violent attacks during their demonstrations and public meetings. The citizens were also subjected to brutality by the actors of violence.

### **Instruments and Scopes**

The instruments of political violence were multiple in this phase. As usual, the physical instruments were used to cause physical harm. The physical instruments included enforced disappearance, extrajudicial killing, torture, attack, rape, imprisonment, detention, violation of freedom of speech and assembly. The legal instruments, such as the ICT (Amendment) act 2013, and the Digital Security act 2018, facilitated the state to identify the targets and perpetrate violence against them. Besides, a new addition to the instrument was a cyber instrument. Slowing down the internet speed, content surveillance, and identification of the targets, banning social media, etc. are the key cyber instruments of violence in this phase. The scope of violence in this phase has also been widened compared to the previous two phases. Previously, it was noticed that the political oppositions and the political programs were targeted by the government agents and the affiliates. But during this phase nonpolitical movements by citizens such as students, teachers, journalists, lawyers were also targeted for perpetration of violence.

Enforced disappearance was always a key instrument of violence by the state agencies in this phase. It never significantly decreased over a period of seven years between 2012 and 2018. On average, approximately 65 persons were reportedly disappeared every year in Bangladesh. Different state agencies were involved in enforced disappearance. The RAB and the Detective Branch (DB) of police were the key actors in abducting people across the country. Between 2012 and 2018, RAB reportedly abducted

129 people (Asian Human Rights Commission, 2019), whereas DB Police abducted 145 people (Odhikar, 2020c). Besides, combined operation of these two agencies are reportedly responsible for enforced disappearance of 12 people during this period. Police was also another lead actor in making people disappeared. In this phase, police allegedly abducted 68 people (Asian Human Rights Commission, 2019), the number is reported to be 70 by another human rights group. (Odhikar, 2020c). There were incidences where plain clothed unidentified people, alongside the members of the law enforcement agencies or claiming to be members of the law enforcement agencies, picked up people (Odhikar, 2013). According to Odhikar (2013), in 2012, five persons were reportedly abducted by the unidentified people. Many of these disappeared people were found dead, while some of them were returned and others were claimed to have been arrested by the police. Sadly, the whereabouts of a large number of disappeared people is still unknown. According to the Asian Human Rights Commission (2019), among the 461 disappeared people between 2012 and 2018, 59 of them were found dead. 293 were brought to the public or returned alive, whereas 109 are still missing.

Enforced disappearance occurred in various forms. For example, some were reportedly picked up by plain-clothed people who identified themselves as members of the RAB and the DB Police from home or from roads, but were never officially arrested, some were claimed to be arrested, but later went missing for a long time. In most instances the respective law enforcing agencies denied of picking up individuals. Despite the increasing number of disappearance and credible accounts from witnesses, the government always claimed that enforced disappearance does not take place in Bangladesh regularly (Ganguly, 2019). In the 67th session of Committee Against Torture (CAT) of the UN in Switzerland,



the Law Minister of Bangladesh told, “We do not recognize the proposition that enforced disappearances occur in Bangladesh frequently. Usually, the cases of certain abduction are reported as enforced disappearances” (Bhuiyan, 2019).

As the numbers of enforced disappearance grew higher, the victims were from various backgrounds. The victims included political leaders of the opposition political parties, political party activists, activists of various wings of the opposition political parties, ruling party activists, associates of the leaders of the opposition political parties, trade union activists, and online activists. Occupations of the victims included students, journalists, educators, day laborer, businessman, farmer, private service holders, tailor, electrician, repairman, agricultural worker, cable operator, mechanic, contractor, lawyer, garments factory workers, housewife, domestic helpers, engineer, physician, etc. Besides, religious leaders, witness of War Crimes Tribunal, panel mayor of municipality, government service holders, a former member of law enforcement agencies were also the victims of enforced disappearance. The variety of the victims suggests that the state widened its targets beyond political opposition, press, and the dissenters.

While there was a continuation of using state apparatus and state agencies against the political opposition, the state agencies also perpetrated violence to gain personal benefit and settle personal issues (Shaon, 2017). Asian Human Rights Commission (2013) argues that ‘This is due to the fact that the state does not exercise reasonable control over its agencies, engages in human rights abuses, and establishes no measures to prevent disappearances. The agencies include inter alia, the police, paramilitary units, the RAB, and other intelligence agencies working under the influence or directly controlled by the armed

forces of Bangladesh. Additionally, deep and rooted corruption facilitates and encourages state officers to abduct people for ransom (though they are also paid by private entities to undertake disappearances) often followed by extrajudicial executions.’ The explanation by the Annual Human Rights Commission implies that enforced disappearance takes place with various objectives. One objective is to benefit from the act of political violence and monetizing the scope of violence. There are allegations against the law enforcement agencies regarding the abduction and demanding ransom. Odhikar (2018) suggests that ‘On October 24, a team of the Detective Branch (DB) of Police of Cox’s Bazaar picked up a businessman named Abdul Gafur, resident of Teknaf. The DB police demanded five-million-taka bribe from his family. Later the Army recovered the 17 hundred thousand takas given by Abdul Gafur’s family as ransom.’

The extrajudicial killing was another regular instrument of the state in this phase. A total of 1556 people were killed by various law enforcement agencies between 2012 and 2018 (Odhikar, 2020). The year 2018 recorded the highest incidents of extrajudicial killing in the last two decades. According to the report of Odhikar, police killed the highest number of victims, more than 60%, which is 949. 380 were killed by the RAB. In 2018, the Narcotics Control Act 2018 was passed in the parliament, and a ‘war on drugs’ was announced by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in May 2018 (Human Rights Watch, 2018). This ‘war’ led to the extrajudicial killing of at least 466 people in 2018, most of them were reportedly committed by the RAB (Amnesty International, 2019). The indiscriminate killing and arrest have contributed to create such fear among the people that even the victims’ families provided fabricated testimonies to the law enforcement agencies ostensibly to save their own lives. The report of Amnesty International (2019) maintains that

‘the law enforcement authorities have recorded witness testimonials in each of the alleged extrajudicial executions. There were serious allegations against the law enforcement agencies of fabricating these witness statements. At least five witnesses interviewed by Amnesty International have revealed that they had not seen the killings but were asked by the police to provide fabricated statements supporting the police version of the deaths as having taken place in alleged “gunfights” or “crossfire”. They said they could not refuse police requests to act as witnesses fearing harsh consequences. Security forces have taken signatures, names, phone numbers and personal details of the witnesses. Later, the witnesses either were called by security forces to verify their statements or were called to the offices of the law enforcement agencies to testify about what they had “witnessed”.’

While a large number of extrajudicial killing created an atmosphere of fear, it also targeted political opposition (Fair, 2019). The killing of Shamsul Islam is a case in point. He was a BNP activist and a contractor by profession. He disappeared before he was allegedly killed in a ‘gunfight’ between two groups of drug traders (Amnesty International, 2019). The report of the Amnesty International finds out that the witness saw that Shamsul Islam was picked up by the police, and a day later, he was killed (Amnesty International, 2019). However, a well-known drug dealer, a Member of Parliament Abdur Rahman Badi (The Daily Star, 2018), remained untouched during this war on drugs (The Dhaka Tribune, 2019). Therefore, it is plausible that the violence perpetrated by the law enforcement agencies was politically motivated against the opposition political parties and the citizens in order to create fear and terror (World Politics Review, 2018).

Freedom of media was also been subjected to restrictions in this phase. There were assaults on people from various backgrounds due to committing alleged ‘unlawful’ activities on media. The government cracked down on media. This contributed to the growing practice of self-censorship. Social media, electronic, and print media have all been subjected to this control. The ‘Information & Communication Technology Act.’ (Amendment) Act 2013 is a case in point. This Act played a pivotal role in restricting press freedom. It was enacted in 2006 and amended in 2013. The most contentious part of the act was the section 57, which was amended in 2013. The earlier version of section 57 (Bangladesh National Parliament, 2006) states, ‘If any person deliberately publishes or transmits or causes to be published or transmitted in the website or in electronic form any material which is fake and obscene or its effect is such as to tend to deprave and corrupt persons who are likely, having regard to all relevant circumstances, to read, see or hear the matter contained or embodied in it, or causes to deteriorate or creates a possibility to deteriorate law and order, prejudice the image of the State or person or causes to hurt or may hurt religious belief or instigate against any person or organization, then this activity of his will be regarded as an offense.’ The punishment for this crime was up to 10 years and a monetary fine up to BDT one crore. However, the Act in 2006 did not empower the police or any other authorized person to arrest a person without the permission of a magistrate and a warrant.

Before the amendment in 2013, there were 426 complaints under this section. According to the police data, among 426 complaints, only a few resulted in arrests or prosecution (Human Rights Watch, 2018). However, in 2013, the amended version of the act increased imprisonment to 14 years and empowered law enforcement agencies to

arrest a person without the permission of a magistrate or a warrant. The law was termed as 'repressive' and 'draconian' by the senior journalists (The Daily Star, 2017). A report of the Daily Star informs that there were more than 700 cases filed under section 57 from 2013 to July of 2017 (The Daily Star, 2017).

Another report of the Dhaka Tribune suggests that the scenario was even worse (Dhaka Tribune, 2018). The report informs that the number of filed cases, accusations, and arrestees almost doubled each year. Particularly, since 2014, it became extensively repressive on the people. Report by the Human Rights Watch (HRW) (2018) shows that the people arrested for criticism on social media can be largely be classified into four groups. These are political criticism, publishing reports by journalists, personal defamation, and offending religious sentiments. Among all these four categories, allegations against the political criticism accounted for most of the cases. The allegations included '*belittling*' the prime minister Sheikh Hasina, her son, and her father Sheikh Mujibur Rahman through objectionable 'image', 'caricature', 'comment', and 'remark', 'using propaganda to deteriorate the law and order', sharing news reports to 'instigate violence', 'defame political leaders', and 'deteriorate law and order'. The people who were alleged to have committed these offenses and arrested came from various backgrounds - business community, human rights activists, civil professions including doctors, lawyers, religious leaders, teachers, opposition political party activists, journalists, students, etc. Most of the 'alleged' contents were found on Facebook while some contents from YouTube, Twitter, Imo were also deemed offensive. The rampant abuse of the law imposed restriction on the press freedom, caused fear among people, encouraged self-censorship to avoid allegation, imprisonment, and prosecutions. Journalists also reported that they cannot write freely

due to the fear of the government and the repressive acts (Sultan, 2018). Imprisonment of the journalists was also noticed those who document and share the news of the use of violence in the protest. The arrest of Shahidul Alam is a case in point. Internationally acclaimed photojournalist Shahidul Alam was arrested for documenting and sharing his views about the student-led protests 'road safety movement'. After being arrested, he was tortured, denied access to a lawyer and bail, and imprisoned for more than 100 days.

While people were arrested and prosecuted for sharing their views on social media, electronic media was also subject to surveillance, suppression, and shut down. The Digital Security Act 2018 is even more suppressive than the ICT (Amendment) Act 2013. Fair (2019, p. 127) argues,

'The new law grants the government broad powers, including search or arrest with a court-issued warrant, based on the suspicion that a target is violating the law. It also mandates heavy fines and long jail sentences—up to 14 years and/or 10 million takas (US\$ 120,000)—for recording government officials secretly or for spreading “negative propaganda” about the 1971 war or Hasina’s father, who is often referred to as “father of the nation.” Anyone found guilty of deliberately publishing materials defaming the state’s image may be jailed for three years and fined Tk 300,000 (US\$ 3,580). These are in addition to other measures intended to deter journalists from investigating the government’s actions or the persons undertaking them.'

Fair (2019) further suggests that in October 2018, a nine-member monitoring cell was created by the government to detect rumors on social media ahead of the election. The

surveillance team looked for contents that ‘threatens communal harmony, disturbs state security, or embarrasses the state’ (Fair, 2019, p. 128).

Multiple television channels were also shut down on various occasions in this phase. The Jamuna Television was shut down on the election day in 2018 while it was broadcasting irregularities in the polling station (NDTV, 2018). International media, local civil society organizations, and scholars have reported massive vote-rigging and voter fraud in the 2018 election (Riaz, 2019). The New York Times opined that it was a ‘farcical vote’ (The New York Times, 2019). The Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) surveyed 50 seats in this election and found there were anomalies in 47 seats out of 50. They termed the election as ‘partially participatory, non-competitive, questionable and faulty’ (Transparency International Bangladesh, 2019). Amidst these allegations, the shutdown of a television channel indicates the authority’s hostility towards freedom of press. Besides shutting down the television channel, the state also shut down high-speed mobile internet to ‘prevent rumors and propaganda surrounding the vote’ (Reuters, 2018). Diganta Television and Islamic Television, two television channels known to be sympathetic to opposition, were shut down in 2013 and never got the permission to resume broadcasting (The Daily Star, 2013).

The incidents of blocking newspaper websites also exemplify the suppression of the press. The Daily Star, an English newspaper is a case in point. It was blocked in 2018 after publishing audio that indicated the involvement of the RAB in the murder of Akramul Haque during the ‘war on drugs.’ Ahmed (2018) argues, ‘When the media deviates from the state narrative and reports evidence of wrongdoing by the Rapid Action Battalion and

Directorate General of Forces Intelligence, there are repercussions. For instance, on June 2, the website of The Daily Star newspaper was blocked in Bangladesh after it released the audio clips that implicated the Directorate General of Forces Intelligence and the Rapid Action Battalion in Haque's murder.' The incidents suggest that the press in Bangladesh has been significantly suppressed in this phase.

The Freedom House report 2018 (2018) about freedom on the net described Bangladesh to be 'partly free' with a score of 49 out of 100. It identified the violations of user rights to be the most affected indicators with a score of 15 out of 40. The score was 46 and 44 out of 100 in 2017 and 2016, respectively. The violations of user rights scores were 14 and 12 out 40 respectively in 2017 and 2016. Therefore, the repressive acts, the imprisonment of journalists, and their prosecution, self-censorship clearly denote the suppression of the press freedom during this phase. The gradual increase of the suppression is also manifested by the scores of Freedom House about freedom on the net.

In summary, the third phase of political violence in Bangladesh stands out among all the three phases in various aspects. First, the perpetration of violence was not limited against only political opposition the press, and the dissenters. Rather, people from various backgrounds have been subjected to violence in this phase. Second, unlike previous phases, the political protests were not only the targets of violence. Rather, multiple nonpolitical movements of students, teachers, laborers faced repression. Third, this phase has seen more active involvement of the government affiliates in perpetrating violence against the citizens. Both the government agents and the government affiliates have enjoyed impunity. Fourth, the new inclusion of cyber instruments along with the ICT (Amendment) Act 2013



and Digital Security Act 2018 helped to redefine the targets of violence. Any person, whether from political opposition or not, can be subjected to the persecution and violence. Therefore, the coercive nature of the state reached a new height, expanded its reach, used various legal and extralegal measures, and targeted a wide variety of citizens.

The reliance of the state on extensive violence, more involvement of the government affiliates with the government agents in perpetrating violence, widening the scopes of violence, and addition of new instruments of violence testify to the fact the government has become more predatory against its citizens in this phase. I argue that the moral legitimacy crisis of the state leads to increased political violence perpetrated or supported by the state. In the third phase, the moral legitimacy crisis of the state was noticeably higher due to several reasons. First, with the help of overwhelming majority in the parliament, the government has abolished the provision of the caretaker government which was previously incorporated in the constitution due to its demand across the political spectrum. The national parliamentary election and the transfer of power was administered by the caretaker government ensuring inclusivity and fairness. Despite the disagreement of the political opposition at the parliament and street agitations opposing the abolishment of the caretaker government, and despite having a divisive verdict by the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court that suggested that the next two consecutive elections can be held under the caretaker government, the incumbent party passed the constitutional amendment using super majority at the parliament. By abolishing this provision, the uncertainty regarding organizing a free and fair election resurfaced in the political landscape. The despair became a reality when the next two parliamentary elections were reportedly manipulated, and the incumbent government stayed in power.

The right to express opinion, and vote, and select a political party to rule the country was practically curtailed by the incumbent party. It should be noted here that the incumbent party came to power in 2008 with popular mandate through a free and fair election administered by the caretaker government. Therefore, when it scrapped the caretaker government provision, it began to lose its moral legitimacy, that is the popular consent and the approval of the political oppositions. The moral legitimacy crisis became severe when the incumbent party rigged the election and remained in power. In such a situation, the political oppositions demanded the resignation of the incumbent government and engaged in political agitations. As a result, the government reacted harshly and adopted violence to confront the political opposition. Besides, since the new political development worsened the moral legitimacy of the government, the incumbent government also began to use force against the nonpolitical movements, dissenters, as well as the potential dissenters. The government and the ruling party targeted both the political opposition and the ordinary nonpolitical citizens in order to curb any possibility of dissent or potential dissent. I argue that such a heavy reliance on violence and the increases scope of political violence is caused by the moral legitimacy crisis of the incumbent government.

## **CHAPTER VII: CONCLUSION**

The nature of violence perpetrated or supported by the Bangladeshi state in three phases since its independence in 1971 have been explained in the previous chapters of this thesis. The changes in the political landscape necessitated dividing the period into three phases: 1972-1990, 1991-2011, and 2012-2018. Violence was perpetrated by various actors that are broadly categorized under government agents and government affiliates. I have also identified a set of instruments that were used against the targets of violence. The targets of violence have also been diversified in each of those three phases. Table 2 provides a compact view of the actors, instruments, and targets of violence in these three phases. The following discussion addresses the changes in the nature, actors, instruments, and scopes of political violence based on the changing political landscape in the three phases.

		Phase 1 (1972-1990)		Phase 2 (1991-2011)	Phase 3 (2012-2018)
		Period 1 (January 1972- 15 August 1975)	Period 2 (16 August 1975-06 December 1990)		
Actor	Government Agents	JRB Military Police	A leftist political faction of the military Armed police DGFI Jail keeper Military Police	DB Police DGFI Joint force Military Police	BGB DB Police DGFI Paramilitary units Police RAB
	Government Affiliates	The Joy Bangla Bahini The Lal Bahini The Shecchashebak Bahini	Terrorists, wings of the ruling party The BNP The JP	Different wings of the ruling party Member of parliament The BAL The BCD The BCL The BICS The BNP The JIB	Different wings of the ruling party The BAL The BCL The BJL
Instruments	Physical	Assault Coups Custodial death Detention Enforced disappearance Imprisonment Indiscriminate shooting Rape Targeted killing Torture	Arrest Assassination Assault Counter coup Coups Custodial death Detention Enforced disappearance Imprisonment Indiscriminate shooting Jail killing  Targeted killing Threat Torture	Custodial death Enforced disappearance Extrajudicial killing Imprisonment Rape Torture	Arson Attack Detention Enforced disappearance Extrajudicial killing Imprisonment Rape Threat Torture

*Table 2: Actors, Instruments, and Targets of Political Violence in Bangladesh*

(Table 2, continues)

		Phase 1 (1972-1990)			
		Period 1 (January 1972-15 August 1975)	Period 2 (16 August 1975-06 December 1990)	Phase 2 (1991-2011)	Phase 3 (2012- 2018)
Instruments	Legal	Special Powers Act, 1974 Emergency Power Rules 1975 Newspapers (Annulment of Declaration) Ordinance 1975	Special Powers Act, 1974 Emergency Power Rules 1975 Special Martial Law Tribunals	Joint Drive Indemnity Ordinance 2003, Armed Police Battalion (Amendment) Act 2003, and cases against the political opposition under Penal Codes	Information & Communication Technology Act (Amendment) 2013 Digital Security Act 2018 Narcotics Control Act 2018 Cases against the political opposition under Penal Codes
	Cyber	-	-	-	Banning social media Limiting internet speed to interrupt communication Surveillance
Target		Opposition political parties Press Dissenters	Opposition political parties Press Dissenters	Opposition political parties Press Dissenters	Opposition political parties Press Dissenters Potential dissenters of various backgrounds

*Table 2: Actors, Instruments, and Targets of Political Violence in Bangladesh*

## **Changes in the Political Landscape**

The political landscape frequently changed in these three phases. The three phases experienced various types of governments, as well as various means of power transition. In the first phase, the system of government was both civilian authoritarian and military regimes. The military regime was also of two types: first a direct martial law, then a pseudo-civilian regime, legitimized through referenda and irregular rigged parliamentary elections.

Transitions of power were both violent and non-violent. For example, in 1975 and in 1981, the two presidents of Bangladesh were assassinated in the military coups, and the government changed. On the other hand, since after 1981, the type of power transition was largely non-violent and mostly through national parliamentary elections.

In the second phase, the power transition mechanism was stable as the provision of caretaker government was incorporated in the constitution. This phase was characterized by almost regular national parliamentary elections under the caretaker government. Among the five national parliamentary elections, only one election resembled the elections of the first phase, organized by the partisan government, and was boycotted by most of the political parties. However, the parliament did not last long in that instance, and an inclusive national parliamentary election followed shortly under the caretaker government system. This mode of power transition through the democratic process allowed alteration of power during every election.

In the third phase, the system of government as well as the type of power transition process changed again. The provision of the caretaker government was abolished from the

constitution with the help of the absolute majority in the parliament, and the country returned to the power transition process under a partisan government. However, unlike the first phase and like the second phase, the third phase experienced regular elections, which is unprecedented in the history of Bangladesh. No incumbent government had ever been successful in organizing regular national parliamentary elections under its supervision except the BAL in 2014 and 2018. More interestingly, while one of the elections was very non-participatory and boycotted by most of the political parties, the other election was administratively very inclusive with the participation of 40 political parties. Nevertheless, both the elections saw the victory of the incumbent government. Even the incumbent government has also successfully completed one of its tenures despite being elected through a one-sided non-participatory election, which is also unprecedented in the history of Bangladesh.

### **Changes in the Nature of Political Violence**

Interestingly, the nature of political violence perpetrated or supported by the state in Bangladesh remained largely similar with a slight variation irrespective of the governance system and mode of state power transition. The nature of violence perpetrated or supported by the state can be categorized into two broader groups. The first is coercion by the government agents, and the second is collaboration and privatization of violence.

The state largely remained reliant on coercion irrespective of these phases. It was manifested by the various agencies of the state in every phase through two types. These are offensive and defensive. We have seen the offensive nature of coercion in case of suppressing alternative political ideology, such as the leftist and rightist ideology. The

banning of political parties and forming one national party called the Bangladesh Krishak Sramik Awami League (BKSAL), the imposition of emergency rule, the imposition of martial laws are a few examples of the offensive coercion. Besides, shutting down the news media, confiscating the copies of newspapers, attacks on political and non-political movements, coups and counter-coups are also the example of the offensive nature of coercion by the state. On the other hand, the state also resorted to the defensive nature of coercion in many instances. For example, saving the police outposts, banks, police stations from the violent attack of the radical political activists needed the defensive nature of coercion in order to protect the government properties. Besides, there were many instances where political activists attacked law enforcement agencies during their protests and processions. In such cases, the violence was a necessary tool for the self-defense of the law enforcement agencies as well as to maintain law and order. These two types of coercive nature have been noticed in every phase irrespective of the political landscape.

However, the descriptions of violence and the volatile political landscapes in the previous discussion demonstrate that the offensive nature of coercion was predominant across the three phases, while the defensive nature of coercion was mostly seen during the first phase. The second and third phases have seen a decreased necessity of defensive nature of coercion. The second phase has seen the defensive nature of coercion in order to counter the rise of violent extremism in the country. On the other hand, the third phase has seen brutal attacks on law enforcement agencies in various instances. Therefore, the defensive nature of coercion was required to a limited extent in this phase.



One might argue that the necessity or possibility of the defensive nature of coercion was not felt strongly enough in the first phase. While I partly agree with this assumption, I argue that the necessity of the defensive nature of coercion depends on the possibility of violence against the state. In the first phase, most of the governments came to power through undemocratic means, including a coup, and martial laws. A few governments came to power through parliamentary elections, but all of them were reportedly rigged (Riaz, 2016). Therefore, the governments were not democratic, and the citizens and the political parties expressed their demands against the government both in a violent and non-violent manner. There are also academic discussions regarding the justifiability of such violence perpetrated by the citizens. In such a circumstance, violence may seem to be necessary 'though it violates the law and produces a harm, is justified because it averts a greater evil and hence produces a net social gain or benefit to society' (Cohan, 2006, p. 905). Brennan (2018) suggests that when the state acts unjust, citizens can resort to justifiable violence. While the notion of 'justifiable' is a contested and complex issue, it is plausible that any government that is not elected through an inclusive, free, and fair election is an unjust government.

I argue that in the first phase, the necessity of violence against the state was felt by the citizens due to two reasons. First, the government was not elected through an inclusive, free, and fair election. Besides, the national parliamentary elections were irregular in the first phase. The irregular elections were also organized under a partisan government. The elections were blatantly rigged and always resulted in the election of the incumbent political party. As a result, the political parties had a lack of trust among them, and it implies that the citizens also could not trust the state regarding the power transition.

Second, the government perpetrated violence against the citizens in order to suppress the political opposition, press, and the dissenters. Therefore, the citizens chose to resort to violence to create pressure on the government against its coercive nature. In such circumstances, the state perpetrated both the offensive and defensive nature of violence.

In the second phase, the governments were democratically elected through relatively inclusive, freer, and fairer elections. The elections were held almost on a regular basis, and the citizens had trust in the caretaker government about organizing a free election where they could freely elect any government. Therefore, despite the coercive nature of the state against the citizens, the citizens barely had the necessity to resort to violence against the state. Therefore, the violence was not a necessity for the citizens. The defensive nature of coercion was not a necessity of the state. In some instances, the rise of militancy and violent extremism (Riaz & Fair, 2011) was countered with the defensive nature of coercion (Ganguly, 2006).

In the third phase, the incumbent government was elected twice through national parliamentary elections. However, the first election was exclusionary and boycotted by most of the political parties where voter turnout was very low (Barry, 2014). The second election in this phase, despite being inclusive, was marred with extensive rigging, deadly violence and crackdown on media (Dalton, 2018). Therefore, in both instances, the government did not earn a popular mandate. This political development fairly resembles the political situation in the first phase. Besides, this phase experienced a growing intensity of violence perpetrated by the state against the citizens. In this circumstance, the reciprocity of violence by the state and the citizens was supposed to be seen as it was

experienced in the first phase. However, this phase also experienced a lesser degree of defensive nature of coercion amidst this political situation. Why would there be a lesser degree of defensive nature of coercion despite the violence prone political circumstances are present? Riaz (2014) argues that the coercion and violence perpetrated by the state has instilled so much fear in the society that such violence could not erupt. Fear has permeated in the society and the citizens are afraid of the consequences, unlike the first phase. The he citizens and the political parties are so much in a culture of fear in this phase that they are barely able to resort to violence (Riaz, 2014). Hence, it is the reason why we have observed a lesser degree of defensive nature of coercion by the state in the third phase.

While the state continued perpetrating violence and widened its targets, and the nature of coercion by the state changed over the three phases, the collaborative and privatized nature of violence also changed in these phases. Although the state is supposed to enjoy and exercise the monopoly of violence, the Bangladesh case provides an alternative example. The state had a set of collaborators in these phases, who, on the one hand, collaborated in perpetrating violence against the citizens. On the other hand, the collaborators privatized the use of violence in order to settle personal issues and gain personal benefits.

The privatized violence was exercised by the political wings of the ruling party, soldiers of the military, military officers, terrorists. Various groups collaborated with the state in perpetrating violence against citizens. The privatization of violence resulted in the killings of military officers, civilians, political opposition leaders, and activists. In some instances, the government did not have any organized collaborators who would perpetrate

violence to help the government to stay in power directly. Particularly, during the initial period of the formation of the BNP and the JP as a political party, they did not have particular group of party collaborators. However, the lack of party collaborators did not stop the privatization of violence. Rather, the members of the law enforcement agencies, the petty goons, and local terrorists perpetrated violence to gain personal interest, monetary benefit, and settle individual disputes.

In the second phase, the privatization of violence extended to the corrupt members of parliament, leaders, and activists of the political wings of the ruling party, members of the law enforcement agencies, and militaries. The instruments included sexual harassment, rape, murder, robbery, extortion, ransom, etc. The privatization of violence resulted in the killing of political activists of the rival political parties, subjugating journalists, and torturing ordinary citizens.

The third phase has seen more intensified collaboration and privatization of violence against the citizens. The privatization has been committed by both the government agents and the government affiliates. The members of the law enforcement agencies have been accused of bribery, corruption, ransom, kidnapping, and killing. On the other hand, the collaborators were from the political wings of the ruling party, including the BAL, the BCL, the BJJ. In most of the instances, leaders and activists of these organizations have enjoyed access to violent instruments and impunity. The privatization of violence has served to settle personal scores, make a monetary benefits, and materialize individual interests, and sustaining a culture of fear through torture, killing, rape, bribery, corruption, tendering, and land grabbing. Therefore, the nature of collaboration changed,

and privatization of violence gained momentum over the phases and helped the incumbent political party to stay in the state power.

### **Changes in the Actors**

The actors of political violence in Bangladesh were multiple. A range of actors emerged and changed over the three phases. I have identified broadly two types of actors in this study. These are government agents and government affiliates. Government agents changed in various circumstances. For example, during the first phase, law enforcement agency, military, paramilitary, and a leftist faction of military perpetrated violence against the citizens. The military perpetrated violence multiple times apart from martial law. The civilian government also deployed the military to perpetrate violence. Police, DGFI played an instrumental role in the first phase. During the military regime, special martial law tribunals sentenced a large number of people to death as well as to imprisonment due to their political opposition to the incumbent government.

In the second phase, while the government agents brought back the military to perpetrate violence against the citizens for a short period, the government also created specialists of violence in this phase. The RAB is accused of extrajudicial killing, enforced disappearance, and human rights violations (Human Rights Watch, 2011). Alongside the RAB, police, joint armed force, the BGB, and jail authorities/. were also the actors of violence. The third phase has also seen the engagement of various law enforcement agencies against the citizens. The difference between the third and the previous two phases is that the military has not been an active participant in perpetrating violence against the citizens.

The second type of actors are the government affiliates, their identity also transformed over time. Although the government affiliates are largely from the political wings of the ruling party, in the second period of the first phase, there were some noticeable changes. In different phase, the political wings of the ruling party varied and were different. For example, in the first period of the first phase, we have seen voluntary armed forces who were formally trained to use violence perpetrated violence against the citizens. The Lal Bahini, the Joy Bangla Bahini, the Shecchashebak Bahini are examples of such government affiliates. During these three phases, leaders, and activists of the political parties such as the BAL, the BCL, the BJL, the BNP, the BCD, the JIB, the BICS. regularly perpetrated violence alongside the government agents. The alternative type of government affiliates was noticed during the second period of the first phase. As the BNP and the JP did not have their dedicated political wings at the early period of the party formation, President Ziaur Rahman and President Hussain Muhammad Ershad used the administrative bodies of the government to collaborate with the government affiliates in perpetrating violence against the citizens. Besides, they also supported violence perpetrated by the petty goons, local terrorists whose actions would benefit the ruling parties in perpetrating violence against the political rivals.

### **Changes in the Instruments and Scopes**

Changes in political landscapes along with the nature of violence and the actors of violence, the instruments and scopes of violence also changed in these three phases. The instruments of violence were largely categorized into two groups, physical and legal. The physical instruments were used to harm the physical integrity of the targets in every phase. The physical instruments were diverse in these phases. For example, in the first phase, the

number of coups, abortive coups, and countercoups were noticeable. Various estimates suggest that at least three successful coups and countercoups took place that were on 15 August, 03 November 1975, and 07 November 1975, while more than 26 abortive coups took place in this phase. In the following two phases, no coups were recorded, although a foiled coup was allegedly planned (The Guardian, 2012). The coups, abortive coups, and countercoups targeted the heads of the state, high profile political leaders, military officers in various cases. Military officials involved in abortive coups and countercoups were tried, often in sham tribunals, and given death sentences in some instances. The other regular physical instruments were imprisonment, targeted killing, attack, torture, detention, and enforced disappearance. The first and second phases saw a large number of imprisonments, detention, targeted killing. The third phase is characterized by a large number of enforced disappearances, attack, torture, periodical detention, etc.

Whereas the physical instruments were used to perpetrate violence against the citizens, the legal instruments facilitated the use of physical instruments for creating a culture of impunity for the perpetrators of violence. In the first phase, The Special Power Act 1974, the Emergency Rule, the special martial law tribunals provided a wider opportunity to the specialists in violence to suppress the people, crush the dissenters, and limit political activities in the country. The Newspaper Declaration (Annulment) Order banned all the newspapers except the state-controlled four newspapers. The first phase also saw the promulgation of the Jatiya Rakkhi Bahini Order, 1972, which was 'devoid of any specifics about the organization, its methods of operation, its powers and authorities, and its accountability as a law enforcement agency' (Riaz, 2016, p. 51). The JRB was authorized with unrestrained violence, unaccountability, and unprecedented impunity.

Alongside, the Indemnity Ordinance 1975 promulgated by Ziaur Rahman and later approved by the parliament in 1979, indemnified the assassins of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

The legal instrument 'The Armed Police Battalion (Amendment) Act 2003' in the second phase created the specialists in violence; for example, an elite force named the RAB, was created which has perpetrated violence against the citizens. The third phase saw the enactment of several controversial laws with the advantage of an absolute majority in the parliament. Among these, the ICT (Amendment) Act 2013, the Digital Security Act 2018, Narcotics Control Act 2018 are the key instruments which have been used to perpetrate ostensibly legitimate violence against the political opposition, citizens, and the dissenters.

In the third phase, the type of instrument had also changed. A new addition to the instrument was the cyber instruments. The government took various measures to monitor, surveil, identify, and criminalize activities on social media. The citizens were subjected to arrest, imprisonment, torture, interrogation for writing, commenting, sharing contents on social media. Besides, slowing down the internet, banning social media, banning several websites are the unprecedented cyber instruments of violence in Bangladesh in the third phase.

With the advent of the new instruments, the scope of violence also changed in these phases. In the first two phases, the scopes of the violence largely remained the same. The political oppositions, press, and the dissenters were the victims. In each instance, the state perpetrated violence using the state apparatus. State always targeted political opponents of the incumbent, press, and the dissenters. The opposition political parties which were ideologically challenging to the incumbent were subjected to violence during the early first



phase. After lifting the ban on politics in 1976, the ruling party faced a number of opposition parties. In the second phase, due to the emergence of a bipartisan politics, a sharp polarization began to take hold. Irrespective of the government, each of the ruling party perpetrated violence against the political oppositions using the government agents.

Apart from the political opposition, the press was a particular target of violence by the state. The pattern of repressive measures on the press has also changed over time. Press was one of the primary targets during the first phase, particularly in the first period. However, the second period has also characterized by systematic repression of the press. The ban of weeklies, newspapers, and detention, and imprisonment of the editors, discharging the editors through executive order, censoring news were regular acts of violence in the first phase. While some measure of press freedom was allowed in the second phase, repression of the journalists did not stop. Rather, due to the privatization of violence, journalists were frequently attacked by the government affiliates. Besides, attacks on the journalists by the law enforcement agencies were also recorded. During the third phase, draconian laws such as the Digital Security Act, and the ICT (Amendment) Act 2018 were used to curb the press freedom. It was combined with shutting down the print and electronic media, abduction of the journalists accusing them publishing and sharing anti-government and anti-state contents, and censoring news through verbal instructions from state agencies. These were the obvious changes in the third phase.

Lastly, the nature, scope, and pattern of violence against ordinary citizens have been transformed over the phases. Earlier in the first and second phases, ordinary citizens became targets of violence when they appeared as the dissenters and politically opponents

to the incumbent. In the third phase the dragnet was expanded, it became indiscriminate, non-political elements became targets as well. The non-political movements in this phase have been subjected to massive repression by the government agents and the government affiliates. On the other hand, violence against ordinary non-political, non-dissenter citizens implies that the state has perpetrated violence against the 'potential dissenters' (Riaz, 2014) . It was meant to refrain from dissenting with the state.

### **Explaining the Changes in the Role of State towards Political Violence**

From the discussion above, we can infer that there has been a significant change in the role of the state in political violence in the third phase vis a vis the first and second phases. Why did this change take place? Central to the political violence in Bangladesh is the perpetration and support of violence by the state which is intrinsically connected to the incumbent party's desire to remain in power by any means and through legal and extra-legal measures, and its use of state's coercive apparatus to confront opposition and any kind of dissention. The opposition political parties' intention to gain power, by any means, adds to the cycle of violence. Under these circumstances, the state resort to offensive or defensive nature of coercion. Every ruling party tends to stay in power by perpetrating violence against its citizens, suppressing the political oppositions, and subjugating the press. While this proclivity towards violence remained constant in the three phases, the intensity of violence had changed in the third phase. The state appeared more violent and intolerant in this phase. It has intensified violent acts, enacted new repressive laws, and expanded its scopes of violence from political opposition to ordinary citizens as well. There have been explanations why the state perpetrates violence, e.g., one reason is to protect its claim over monopoly of legitimate use of violence. (Riaz, 2019)

I agree with this explanation and explain it in the case of Bangladesh in light of Hanna Arendt's argument. In the second chapter, we have learned that when the legitimacy of the state is at stake, the state tries to ensure it through perpetrating violence. Legitimacy is also the basis of any government to rule the country. In the second chapter, we have learned that the state perpetrates violence when its legitimacy is threatened. The logic of violence requires to ensure or enforce legitimacy. In chapter two, it was also mentioned that the boundary between the state, government, and the incumbent is blurred. The blurring boundary of these institutions has been a recurring problem since the founding of the country. However, over time, especially since 2011, the boundary has been obliterated. That is why the scope, nature and instruments have changed and it has become so vicious, lethal, and intolerant. The conflagration of state and government (and the ruling party) is the problematic issue and contributed to the nature of the violence. I have contextualized the concept of legitimacy in case of Bangladesh that while the state itself does not have legitimacy crisis; the incumbent government does have a moral legitimacy crisis (Riaz, 2014). The opposition political parties have frequently challenged the moral rights of the government to rule the country. The challenges posed at the government was dealt with coercion in every phase. Therefore, I argue that in the case of Bangladesh, the moral legitimacy crisis of the government resulted in the changing role of the state in perpetrating violence against the citizens. The incumbent government has intensified violence through the government agents and government affiliates in order to enforce legitimacy and thus stay in the state power.

## **Conclusion**

This thesis intended to study the role of the state towards political violence in Bangladesh. It began with the questions as to whether there has been any change in the role of state towards political violence in terms of its nature and scope as well as what explains the changing nature if there is a change. Through an understanding of violence perpetrated and supported by the state in various phases, we have learned that the nature, actors, instruments, and scopes of violence have changed over the phases under the shed of the volatile political landscape. The common pattern that has been identified is that the violence was always perpetrated by the government using violent apparatus of the state to remain in the power. The governments in Bangladesh suffered from a moral legitimacy crisis. The moral legitimacy crisis of the government sometimes changed the government through free and fair elections. Otherwise, the transitions were either through violence sometimes, or there was not any power transition despite the recurrence of the national parliamentary elections as the incumbent government remained in power. In this volatile political landscape, the citizens, media, political oppositions, and the dissenters and the potential dissenters were subjected to political violence by the government agents and its affiliates. The state also facilitated the privatization of violence as it helped to sustain the culture of violence and thus enforce legitimacy in the political landscape.

Although, violence has been a regular tool of the state against its citizens in all three phases, the third phase stands out among all these three. In this phase, the coercive capacity of the state has significantly increased. The state has enacted new repressive laws that facilitate identifying its targets. The state has created schism among the citizens using two issues, that are the spirit of the independence war and the priority of development

over democracy. The schism has contributed to identify the friends and foes of the state and thus perpetrate violence against the targets. Besides, we have seen the increased involvement of non-state actors in violence perpetrated against the citizens. The non-state actors are from various wings of the incumbent party as well as non-partisan civilians. The non-state actors have received the backing of the state actors when they perpetrated or collaborated in violence against the citizens, and largely enjoyed impunity. The scopes of violence in the third phase also changed significantly. Besides the political opposition, the press, and the dissenters, the nonpolitical movements, the potential dissenters, and the ordinary civilians have also been targeted for perpetration of violence. The addition of cyber instruments to perpetrate and facilitate violence is also a significant change in this phase. Considering these substantial changes in the third phase compared to previous two phases, I argue that the state has become more predatory in the third phase. The coercive capacity of the state has increased, and used against the citizens, and the non-state actors have also regularly perpetrated violence within the normal routinized day to day politics. Therefore, the contribution of this thesis lies in the identification of the changing nature of political violence and its explanation. In the academic works, violence perpetrated and supported by the state and its various agencies has long been overlooked. This thesis identifies the gap and attempts to contribute to this academic lacuna. This thesis can also be considered as an example for countries experiencing rise in violence perpetrated or supported by the state, particularly in a non-civil war situation. The existing academic works are largely limited to violence perpetrated or supported by the state in a civil war situation. Therefore, readers can find the role of state in political violence particularly how a state perpetrates violence and support violence through various non-state actors when

there is no war. The theoretical framework used in this thesis can be employed to understand the causes of and conditions for state perpetrated violence in non-war political situations.

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